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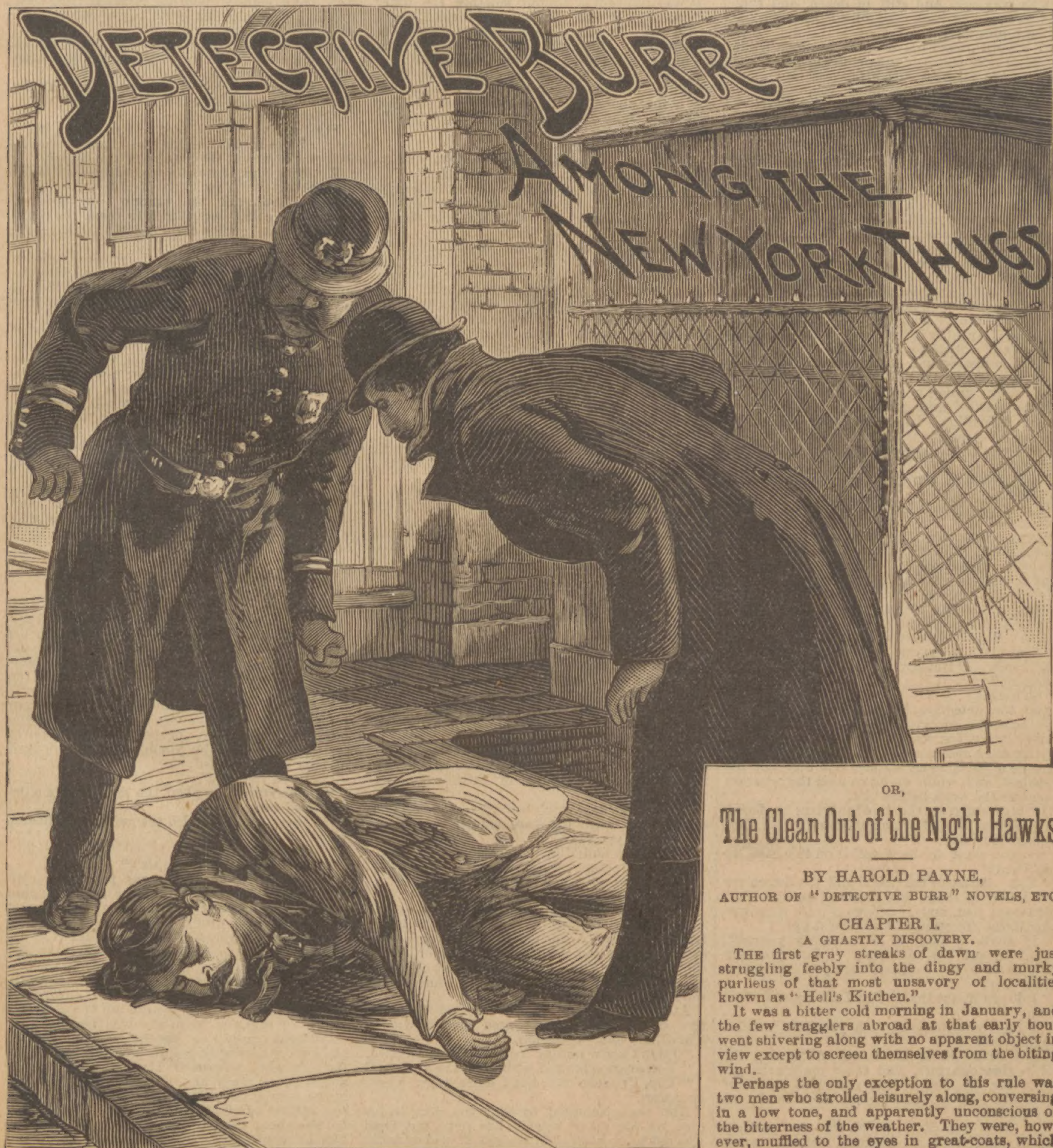
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OR,

The Clean Out of the Night Hawks.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF "DETECTIVE BURR" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A GHASTLY DISCOVERY.

THE first gray streaks of dawn were just struggling feebly into the dingy and murky purlieus of that most unsavory of localities known as "Hell's Kitchen."

It was a bitter cold morning in January, and the few stragglers abroad at that early hour went shivering along with no apparent object in view except to screen themselves from the biting wind.

Perhaps the only exception to this rule was two men who strolled leisurely along, conversing in a low tone, and apparently unconscious of the bitterness of the weather. They were, however, muffled to the eyes in great-coats, which may have accounted in a measure for their indifference.

"ANOTHER TRAGEDY IN THIS HARD LOCALITY," THE GREAT DETECTIVE OBSERVED.

One of these was a man of medium size, but of extraordinarily athletic build, and his nervous, elastic step showed him to be a person of more than ordinary activity, while his keen, restless eye indicated alertness and determination.

The man, in fact, was none other than the well-known detective, Thaddeus Burr.

His companion was the patrolman who belonged on that particular beat.

Thad had been working upon a case in the neighborhood, and had reached that point where he felt safe in turning it over to the police, and was just now in consultation with the patrolman upon the subject, giving him certain clues so that the latter might make the necessary arrests.

When the two men reached the middle of the block between Thirty-ninth and Fortieth streets on Eleventh avenue, the patrolman cut diagonally across the street in the direction of the southeast corner of Fortieth street and Eleventh avenue, and the detective accompanied him, still keeping up the conversation.

So deeply were they absorbed in the matter of their conversation, that neither one paid much attention to anything else, and it was not until they reached the corner of the street in question and the detective's foot came in contact with some object lying near the curb, that he paused with a shudder and the exclamation, "Uh!" and proceeded to examine the object.

It did not take long to see by the dim light of the coming day that it was the body of a man, that he was cold and stiff in death, and that from the pool of congealed blood near him, he had been murdered!

Not a word passed between the two men while they were stooping over the prostrate form, but when he was satisfied with his investigation and straightened up, the great detective observed:

"Another tragedy in this hard locality. A case of murder."

"Yes," rejoined the patrolman, "another victim of Hell's Kitchen."

"What is your reason for thinking so?" asked the detective, curiously eying his companion.

"Well, first of all," rejoined the policeman, "it is just the kind of a job you might expect from that quarter, and in the second place, I recognize the man as a frequenter of that den."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes, he was known as Shang Maher. He had a sweetheart who lives in one of the elegant apartments of that palatial abode, I believe."

"Do you know her name?"

"Sal, or Sarah something or other. You will have no trouble in learning all about her, if you think of working up the case."

"That is just what I contemplate doing," declared the detective. "I'll leave you to look after the body, while I go to Hell's Kitchen and report the matter, and get myself detailed upon the case, if possible. I have long had a desire to rout the denizens of that famous resort, and this will be as good an opportunity as I will ever get."

The patrolman shrugged his shoulders suggestively.

"I must say that I don't envy you your job," he observed.

"It probably won't be pleasant," responded Thad lightly. "There is a good deal of our work that isn't. But it will be exciting, and excitement is what detectives live on—enjoy."

The other laughed.

"Then you ought to get rolling fat on this job, for you'll find excitement enough for a whole family. But the danger is what I look at."

"That don't worry me in the least," observed Thad coolly. "But I must go. Good-morning, Summer."

"So long!"

And the detective hurried away. Half an hour later he reported the case at the Police Headquarters, but was compelled to wait a long time for the appearance of the inspector.

In the mean time he strolled out and got his breakfast, and while doing so took the occasion to outline the work before him.

On his return to the Headquarters he found the inspector in, and after a short talk with him, the inspector said:

"So you want to be detailed on this case, do you, Thad?"

"Yes. Hitherto the police and the detectives have failed to make any headway against that murderous den, and I believe I can do something in the direction of breaking it up."

"If anybody can, it is certainly yourself, Thad," mused the inspector. "But you are going to have the toughest case you ever essayed, my boy."

"I do not doubt that. But I am equal to it, I think."

"I hope you are, and wish you luck," smiled the inspector.

Thad returned to his room on leaving the Police Headquarters, and there made arrangements for his trip to the notorious resort of thugs and thieves, and before noon made his way thither.

He found the place, which was not entirely new to him, to be a two-story, rickety wooden building, which stood near the corner of Thirty-ninth street and Eleventh Avenue. There was

an alleyway cut through the center of the building and leading back to a sort of court which was flanked on every side by stables and pigpens and half-filled with old lumber and rubbish. On the north side of the court was a flight of stairs leading up to a shanty which was built on the roof of one of the stables.

Seeing no one about the building the detective made his way back to the filthy court. Still seeing no one, he mounted the stairs. The door of the shanty was closed, and Thad knocked.

The door was opened, and a tall, broad-shouldered man with shaggy red beard and thick bushy hair of the same color, stood before him.

A glance was sufficient to tell the detective that this was Old Man Anderson, the King of Hell's Kitchen. The latter eyed Thad suspiciously for a moment, and then growled:

"Well, what d'ye want?"

"I'm looking for a woman by the name of Sarah something, who lives in your house, King," answered the detective.

The king looked Thad over once more, and finally said:

"Sally Womelsdorf, I reckon yer mean. What d'ye want wid her?"

"I have a little business with her," responded the detective.

"Looker hiar, young feller," growled the king, after another stare, "you're a detective, ain't yer?"

"No. Only a friend of hers," replied Thad, with an innocent countenance.

It was impossible to tell whether the other believed him or not. It was more than likely he did not. At all events he looked extremely incredulous. However, after some reflection, the monarch observed with his usual grunt:

"Wal, it ain't none o' my business, anyhow. Ye'll find her in t'other house. Jes' knock at one o' the doors on the second floor. If yer strikes de right door, an' de gal's sober 'nuff, she'll open it fer yer."

"Thank you, king."

And the detective descended the rickety stairs again and returned to the main building.

The king kept his eyes upon him as long as he was in sight, and although Thad showed no outward indications of alarm, he was not pleased with the old villain's scowl.

Thad climbed the narrow, dirty stairs leading to the second floor of the main building, and at the head of the stairs saw two doors, one at the right and the other at the left.

Taking his chances upon the first, he knocked.

The door was promptly opened by a dissolute-looking woman with black eyes and a bloated complexion, and a strong odor of spirits about her.

She stared stupidly at the detective, but did not speak.

"Is this Miss Sarah Womelsdorf?" asked Thad.

The woman chuckled sneeringly.

"Wal, I sh'd hope not," was the sarcastic reply.

"Where will I be likely to find her?"

"Try de udder door," suggested the woman.

And with another low, derisive chuckle, closed the door in the detective's face.

Thad was not in the least put out. It was the kind of treatment he expected from these people, and would have been surprised if he had received any other.

He put his ear to the other door before venturing to knock, and listened, but no sound was to be heard. Finally he knocked, but was greeted with no response.

After waiting a reasonable time, the detective repeated the knock, but with the same result. Indeed, he was compelled to repeat it a good many times. After a long time, however, the door was cautiously opened, and a more vicious and dissipated-looking woman than the first confronted him.

"Is this Miss Sarah Womelsdorf?" asked the detective, in as polite a tone as though he had been addressing a leader of Fifth Avenue society.

Instead of answering directly, the woman, after a long, searching stare, asked:

"What d'yer want?"

"I want to find Miss Womelsdorf."

"Wal, I'm her. What d'yer want of me?"

"I want to ask you a few questions."

"Bout what?"

"In regard to a man named Shang Maher."

A shudder seemed to agitate the woman's frame at sound of the name, and she turned so as to conceal her face behind the door, which she held only a few inches open, and appeared to be engaged in conversation with some one in the room, in an undertone.

At length the face reappeared, and the detective could not help but note that it wore a scared, nervous expression.

"I don't know nothin' 'bout him," she snarled.

"You are acquainted with him, are you not?"

"Yep, I've seen him, but I don't know where he is now."

And she attempted to shut the door in his face, as the other woman had done, but Thad was not to be so easily disposed of, and adroitly slipped his foot between the door and the jamb.

"One moment," he commanded sternly. "When did you last see this man?"

"Who is dat? A detective?" came a gruff voice from within.

"Come out and see!" was Thad's quick rejoinder.

"So I will, blame quick, ef yer don't git erway from dat door!" growled the unseen speaker.

"You will come then, for I do not propose to go away until I have obtained the information I desire," responded the detective firmly. And then ignoring the fellow completely, repeated the question to the woman:

"When did you last see Maher?"

"Tell him Fourt' o' July," came the voice within, at which the woman chuckled and made another attempt to close the door.

Thad was determined that she should do nothing of the kind, and a struggle ensued.

The woman had the advantage, being on the inside, and moreover being remarkably strong, and for some moments gave him all he wanted to hold his own.

All this time Thad wondered why the man inside did not come to the woman's assistance. But he soon discovered the cause, for concentrating all his strength in one heroic effort, he finally succeeded in hurling the door wide open, at the same time sending the half-drunken woman reeling to the floor.

The detective then had a full view of the interior of the room, and saw, to his disappointment that it was empty! The man, whoever he was, had evidently made his escape by way of a window, which, in his haste to get out, he had neglected to close after him.

Thad hurried to the window and looked out in time to see the fellow rapidly descending a rude ladder set against the side of the house.

Drawing his revolver and leveling it at the man, the detective called in a stern voice:

"Stop, or I will fire!"

The fugitive paid no heed to the threat, however, except to increase his speed, and in an instant more was at the bottom of the ladder.

Realizing that it was folly to waste his time in attempting to check the fellow's flight by threats, Thad quit the window and hastened out of the room, determined to reach the court as quickly as possible and head the fugitive off before he escaped.

The detective was satisfied, from the fellow's actions, that he had something to do with the murder of Shang Maher, and believed that in his capture he would pretty nearly solve the mystery.

Although he had had only a casual glimpse of the fellow, Thad felt certain that he would have no trouble in identifying him, even should he make his escape from the yard; nevertheless he did not propose to allow himself to be put to that trouble if good running would prevent it, and so dashed down the stairs at a break-neck speed.

The detective had nearly reached the bottom of the stairs, when a sudden and unexpected impediment to his progress appeared.

It was none other than "Bull" Anderson, the oldest son of the king, and a man whom Thad knew to be a desperate character—one who would a little rather fight than eat, especially if he had the advantage of his antagonist.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

FOR an instant the detective was taken aback by the sudden appearance of the ruffian in his road, knowing the man to be one of the most desperate characters in the city; he only hesitated a moment, however, and, ignoring the fellow's presence, attempted to rush past him.

If the dark scowl upon the latter's face was not sufficient proof that he was bent upon a row the fellow's actions were, for he planted his burly form in front of the young man in a dogged manner as he growled:

"Where ye goin'?"

"Down-stairs," replied the detective in a determined tone.

"I guess not," growled the ruffian in a hoarse voice.

"Why not?"

"'Cause I won't let yer see?"

The detective saw that it was folly to multiply words with the fellow. If he hoped to gain his point it must be through action, and that of the most sudden order. So, before the ruffian had time to anticipate what he was about to do, Thad dealt him a right-bander under the ear that sent him reeling against the side of the casing, where he was compelled to cling to the railing to keep from falling; and then before the bruiser had time to recover himself the detective dashed by him and bounded down the stairs.

Without raising an instant he made for the back door, hoping to reach the court into which the man who had retreated from Sarah Womelsdorf's room must have descended, before the latter would have time to effect his escape. A few strides brought him to the rear door, and he was about passing out, when he again found himself confronted, this time by two men. One was past middle-age, with a powerful frame and forbidding visage; and the other a much

younger man, and quite as gigantic in stature and as repulsive in aspect.

The former was old Lum Hawkins, an inmate of Hell's Kitchen, and the latter "Butch" Morrison, the king's youngest son.

The detective realized the folly of attempting to cope with these two bullies, and resolved upon stratagem to help him out of his difficulty; so without a word he turned and fled toward the front door.

The action was so unexpected to the men they did not have presence of mind enough to follow, and the detective succeeded in clearing the door before they realized what had happened.

Once outside, Thad took time to reflect. He felt that he had made some progress—in discovering the woman who had been associated with the murdered man, and also that the man (whoever he might be) who was in her room at the time he (the detective) called was, judging from his actions, either guilty of, or accessory to, the crime. To discover who the man was, hunt him down and arrest him, would not be very difficult with a man of Thad's experience and cunning. He had gained two important clues, and only patience was required to insure success.

And just here a happy thought occurred to him: He would procure a room in the immediate neighborhood, which would enable him to watch his game more closely than he could otherwise do. And he lost no time in securing a furnished room on Thirty-ninth street near Eleventh avenue, whither he removed his effects, which included a trunk well stored with disguises of various kinds.

Thad's first move after getting into his new quarters was to make himself up as a very tough bum, and about dark made his way back to Hell's Kitchen.

On the way he had purchased a bottle of whisky and put it in his pocket. Reeling into the hall or alley he alluded to, the detective paused to listen, and was rewarded by hearing loud talking in one of the ground-floor rooms in which it appeared that several persons were gathered.

He felt that he was taking desperate chances, but knocked at the door.

The talking ceased inside, and then some one demanded in a gruff voice, "Who's there?" and an instant later the door opened and a brazen young woman with curly hair banged down to within a half an inch of her eyes, confronted him. It was the king's youngest daughter, Mag. She pulled a faded shawl up around her ears as the cold wind whirled in at the open door, and asked in a sniffling voice as though she had a cold:

"Wal, what d'yer want?"

"Shut that door!" roared a voice from within.

"I wa'n't see Hawkins," rejoined Thad, pretending to be very drunk, at the same time displaying his bottle of whisky.

This appeared to operate as an open sesame, for the girl grinned, and, turning about, said to somebody inside:

"Lum, hyar's a friend o' yours wid sumpin' ter drink."

The detective could not hear the purport of the growl which came in response, but he could easily guess it, for the next instant the girl opened the door wide enough for him to enter, at the same time jerking her head in a manner that indicated that she meant the action for an invitation to come in.

Thad staggered into the room, which was a large, poorly-furnished apartment, and found old Hawkins, Bull Anderson and two other men whom he did not recognize, sitting at a table playing cards, and several others, including three or four women, sitting around a large rusty stove. Most of the occupants of the room were smoking strong pipes and the atmosphere was blue with smoke and stifling with the odor of tobacco of the cheapest grade.

To the detective's surprise neither Hawkins nor any one else gave him more than a passing glance and evinced no concern regarding his entrance. Hawkins raised his eyes from his cards and jerked his head slightly, which made it appear that he thought he recognized the new-comer, and then went on with his game.

Thad staggered over to the table and, banging the bottle down upon it, hiccupped:

"Hav' (hic) er d-drink, gem'n," and then sunk into a chair near the stove.

This caused a cessation of the game long enough for each one of the players in turn to take a pull at the bottle, after which it was passed to one of the sitters about the stove, who took a pull at it and then passed it along to the next, and from that it made a complete circuit of the stove, so that—although the bottle held a quart—by the time it reached Thad again it was empty.

"Sorry," said the woman who handed it to him, and whom he recognized as the same at whose door he had inquired for Sarah Womelsdorf; "sorry I couldn't leave yer a swig; but er quart o' rum don't go fur in this crowd."

"Tha's all right," mumbled the detective drowsily.

"He's got 'bout nuff now," chuckled one of the women.

"Plenty more w'ere tha' came f'om," drawled Thad, with his eyes half-shut.

"All right," observed the woman who had last spoken, and whom the others addressed as "Liz," "ef youse has got de dirt we'll send out fer de p'izeu."

Thad fumbled in his pocket for some time and at length drew out fifty cents and handed to the woman.

The latter took the money and the bottle and then in a cracked, rasping voice called out, "Chimmie!"

Presently a ragged boy about eight or nine years old came out of a dark corner and silently took bottle and money.

"Go ter Phil's," ordered the woman, and the urchin vanished.

Very little conversation passed between the sitters until after the bottle had returned and been emptied, and then they appeared to brighten up and grow talkative. For a time the conversation was on various topics which did not interest the detective, who affected to be asleep; but, after awhile, some one broached the subject of the late murder.

"How does Sal take it?" growled one of the men, after the subject had been discussed for some time.

"Oh, she don't mind," rejoined the woman next to Thad, whom the other addressed and referred to as "de Tank," probably on account of her wonderful capacity for liquor. "She wasn't never stuck on Shang, see?"

"W'at was Packey jealous of, den?" asked the man.

"He wasn't jealous, see?" returned the Tank, with a sneer.

"No? Den w'y did he fix Shang?"

"W'y, it was jist like dis," answered the Tank, taking her pipe out of her mouth long enough to spit upon the stove. "Ye see, Packey was sweet on Sal, an' one day he goes to de king an' sez, sez he, 'King, I've been er courtin' Sal fer some time wid intentions, see! an' now I heard dat Shang Maher's been a-splittin' on me—doin' me dirt, see?' 'W'at's Shang been a-sayin'?' says de king. 'He's been a-tellin' Sal dat I hed er nudder woman, see?' 'Well,' sez de king, sez he, 'youse knows w'at ter do, don't yer?' 'No,' sez Packey, wonderin'. 'Go out an' settle it,' sez de king."

"An' did he?"

"Don't ax me. Say, youse is awful thick. C'u'dn't see er hole in er cart-w'heel, c'u'd yer?"

"Course, I knows w'at it looks like, but—"

"Wal, dat'll do fer youse, Hub McKeeve."

"Hez Packey been round sence?"

"Shure."

"Ain't he feered de cops'll git on to 'im?"

"I ain't sayin' he's hiar now. He was dis mornin', an' er detective was onter his scent, so Packey lights."

"W'ere is he now?"

"W'y, he's at—"

"Say," interposed Bull Anderson, turning abruptly upon the speakers, "d'yer know who de mug is dat's lis'nin' ter yer chatter?"

"W'at!" cried both in a breath.

"D'yer know who de mug is dat's playin' sleep an's been playin' funk all dis time?"

Both parties stared first at Bull, and then at the detective, with an expression of the utmost consternation.

"Er pal o' Lum's, ain't 'e?" the woman finally gasped.

At this old Hawkins turned and surveyed the detective critically, and shook his head.

"Never seen him afore," he growled.

"Jest w'at I tho't," declared Bull, with a dark scowl. "Say, in my 'pinion he's er smell-er."

"A detective?" cried Liz, who had been silent up to this moment.

"Thet's w'at."

A general look of consternation passed over every face in the room, as their owners stared at the apparently unconscious detective.

Still Thad did not stir.

"I've seen de game played too often afore," continued Bull, in an angry tone. "He's already heered 'nuff ter make it warm fer some on us, see?"

"Den," said old Hawkins, in a quiet tone, "don't let 'im out. Dead men don't tell no tales!"

The detective saw that it was getting pretty warm for him, and his only hope was to escape as quickly as possible. Opening his eyes sufficiently to see the distance between him and the door, he sprang to his feet and made one bound and reached it. But, he was not quick enough. Before he could get the door open two powerful men sprang after him and pinioned him fast.

Thad was too much of an expert in such matters to make much of a struggle at the outset.

In the first place, he knew that it would be useless to struggle against such odds; and in the second, he knew that the less resistance he offered, the sooner was he likely to catch his assailants off their guard.

So he took matters coolly, remained perfectly inactive and watched his opportunity.

His course was a surprise to the two men who held him in their vise-like grasp.

They had expected to have a heroic set-to with

him, and did not know what to make of his conduct.

Finally Bull Anderson, who held his right arm, growled:

"Yer gives up mighty easy, don't yer?"

"W'at's de use doin' any'ting else?" murmured the detective, in a dejected voice.

"Come off!" cried Anderson. "None o' dat. We knows dat ain't yer liago. Youse ain't no rounder."

"Who says so?"

"I sez so."

"Wal, I reckon youse knows, an' dere's no use fer me ter chin."

Anderson stood at arm's-length and surveyed the detective critically for some moments.

"Yer don't mean ter say dat yer a crack?" he finally observed incredulously.

"Ax dem as knows," grinned the detective.

"I don't b'leeve it, see? And dat goes."

"Dat's all right, but if youse'll let go me arms fer er minit, I'll soon convince yer w'at I am," said Thad.

The ruffian reflected for a moment, meanwhile scrutinizing the detective's face.

"Ef yer wasn't er detective," he growled at length, "w'at made yer try ter cut?"

"'Cause yer talked o' fixin' me, an' I t'ought dat was der easies' way outen it. See?"

Bull reflected again for a moment, and then said:

"Wal, we'll try yer; but if yer tries ter cut dis time, look out fer yerself! Dat gces, see? Cal, slack up on de mug."

With that both men let go of him, and the instant they did so the detective placed his back against the door and whipped out a pair of revolvers and leveled one at the head of each of his late captors.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that the men were taken completely by surprise and panic-stricken.

They backed away trembling and livid with fear.

"Make a move toward me, and I'll perforate you!" he cried in a voice so full of sternness that they could not fail to understand its meaning.

To two men slunk back to their places behind the table, and neither they or any of the rest offered to molest the defiant detective.

Seeing that he had them well frightened, he thought it best to take advantage of their temporary panic, and suddenly hurling open the door, the crook-hunter made his escape.

Once outside, he lost no time in returning to his room, where he altered his disguise to that of an old man and then returned to a point on the opposite side of the street from Hell's Kitchen and there in the shadow of a doorway he took up his stand where he could watch the movements of the inmates of the notorious den hoping that the man called Packey might return.

It was a cold and dismal vigil. The wind howled and shrieked and skurried through the deserted streets, but all was quiet about the den across the street. No one came or went, but still the young men kept his post.

Hour after hour went by and the cold crept up his trousers legs and down his back, and the young man stamped and pulled the collar of his great-coat up around his ears, but still could not avoid shivering.

One by one the lights were extinguished in Hell's Kitchen and all was as silent as the grave. Not a soul was seen moving about and the detective finally concluded that they had all retired.

He did not quit his post, however, deciding to remain another hour and watch for developments.

Another hour went by. It was now long after midnight and, as nothing suspicious had occurred about the house, Thad concluded to give up his tedious watch.

But just at that moment something did occur which caused him to shrink back into his place of concealment again.

Two figures came out of Hell's Kitchen and started across the street toward where the detective was concealed.

They were muffled to the eyes, but, as they passed under a street lamp Thad had no trouble in recognizing them as Bull Anderson and old Hawkins.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

WHEN the two men reached Thad's side of the street they turned into Thirty-ninth street and proceeded along that thoroughfare.

Allowing them to get a little the start of him, the watcher started in pursuit, but crossed to the other side of the thoroughfare and kept in the shadow and far enough in the rear not to attract their attention.

The men continued along Thirty-ninth street, never looking back, which satisfied the detective that they had no suspicion that they were being shadowed.

Their gait was so rapid for a long time that Thad had to almost trot to keep up with them; but, after they reached Broadway they slackened their pace, apparently for the purpose of avoiding suspicion, as men out upon a guilty mission are apt to do, and once or twice the detective

was almost sure they had seen him following, from the manner in which they started over toward his side of the street; but as they soon pushed on again, he concluded that they had been looking at some other object.

When they reached that portion of Thirty-ninth street which is thrown into deep shadow by the old reservoir on Fifth avenue the men increased their pace again, and did not slacken it until they reached Madison avenue.

All this time Thad had been wondering where the men could be going at this time of night, but as they turned up-town at Madison avenue, he was no longer in doubt.

"There can be but one solution to this affair," mused the detective. "Those chaps are out on a burglarizing expedition; and if that is their lay, I'll just spoil their fun."

The ruffians kept on up the avenue until they reached Fifty-second street, and here they turned east again, but only went about half a block in that direction, when they paused in front of a palatial mansion and engaged in an earnest conversation which lasted for several minutes.

Finally one of them approached the house, leaving his companion on the sidewalk.

"This is where they expect to do their work," thought the detective; "and that fellow is going in to reconnoiter. Hello! What does that mean?"

The exclamation was called forth by the ruffian's conduct. He had ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

This appeared to be a strange manner for a burglar to commence operations.

As Thad watched, the front door opened, and he saw the ruffian hand the attendant who opened the door a note!

The door was then closed, and the man returned to his companion on the sidewalk.

Another conversation then appeared to be passing between the two worthies, but in so low a tone that the detective could hear nothing, although he had crossed the street and concealed himself within a few feet of where the men stood.

After a few moments the men turned east again and walked to the next corner.

It was now necessary for Thad to recross the street and gain a position about half-way between the house and the corner of the street, so that he could keep the house and the two men both in sight at the same time.

The men paused when they reached the corner, and from the way they kept glancing back toward the house it was evident they expected some one.

In this surmise the detective was not mistaken. A few moments later a figure issued from the area of the house and walked rapidly in the direction the men had gone.

When the figure had arrived opposite the detective he saw it was that of a woman, but so closely veiled it was impossible to determine her rank. However, inasmuch as she had doubtless come in response to the note handed in by the ruffian, it was natural to suppose she was not a domestic, at all events.

She kept up her rapid walk until she reached the corner where the men were standing, when she stopped and entered into conversation with them.

Thad approached as near as he thought safe, which was close enough to see all that passed between the parties, although he could hear nothing of their conversation.

After considerable talk, during which all parties appeared to become greatly excited, the woman was seen to hand one of the men something which had the appearance of a roll of bills. She then abruptly left them and returned to the house, walking as rapidly as before, while the men turned down Fourth avenue.

The detective shadowed them again, only to find that they returned to Hell's Kitchen.

Late as the hour was the detective could not be content to retire until he had found out who occupied the house on Fifty-second street, and to that end returned to the place as soon as he had seen the men re-enter Hell's Kitchen.

All was darkness in the Fifty-second street mansion when he ascended the stoop, but a flash of his dark-lantern enabled him to read the door-plate, which was as follows:

JULIUS P. VAN WERTH.

This was a surprise to the detective, for he knew the family to be one of the oldest and most respectable in the city, and what could any member of it have to do with the inmates of Hell's Kitchen?

There was some terrible mystery about the affair, which the detective was determined to probe if possible. As he made his way back to his room he tried again and again to formulate some theory regarding the affair, but failed. He endeavored to persuade himself that the woman whom he had seen come out of the house was only a menial, and as such, might naturally enough belong to the same class as the Anderson gang. But, how came she with the money—if money it was which he had seen her give Bull Anderson, and he could believe it was nothing else—if she was only a servant?

An idea occurred to him. Perhaps as an accomplice the woman was occupying the position of a domestic for the sake of the advantage it gave her in robbing her master?

The detective had now reached his own door and was about to ascend the stairs when a small figure arose from a dark corner in the doorway. The detective flashed his light upon it, when he discovered it to be the boy they called "Chimie" in Hell's Kitchen.

When Thad discovered who the boy was, he naturally concluded that the little fellow had been sent there by the Anderson gang to spy upon him.

Two things struck the detective very forcibly.

One was the utter brutality of sending the child out upon such a bitter cold night, and half clothed at that; and the other was that the gang had discovered the location of the spotter's room.

What he wondered at, however, was that the boy should have been so stupid as to place himself in the very doorway through which the detective must pass, knowing, as he must, that he would be discovered.

The lad stood shivering and dancing about and slapping his hands to keep from freezing, at the same time gazing intently and eagerly into the detective's face.

"Well, my boy," began Thad, in a not unkindly voice, "what are you doing here at this time of night in the cold? Did the folks over there compel you to come?"

"Please, sir," answered the boy, his teeth chattering so violently that he could scarcely speak; "I want to speak to you. No, sir, they didn't send me. I came of my own accord."

Here was a double surprise for the crook-catcher.

First, the boy's language, which was not that of the inmates of Hell's Kitchen; and second, that he should have come of his own accord at such an hour and upon such a night to speak to him. The detective's curiosity was aroused, and he was determined to see what there was in it.

"Very well, my lad. Come up-stairs," he said.

With that the detective unlocked the street door and ascended to the second floor, where his room was located, closely followed by the shivering little chap.

Upon opening his door Thad found that the fire which he had made in the stove before going out was still burning, and the room was comfortable. This was particularly grateful to the child, who approached the stove at once and proceeded to warm his numb little hands.

Meanwhile Thad had lighted the gas, and seating himself by the stove, surveyed the boy from head to foot for some minutes before addressing him.

The detective now saw that the child was much older than he had at first appeared to be, and that, although he was pinched and pale from want of proper nourishment or ill treatment, he possessed a bright and rather good-looking face. His hair was light-brown instead of the carrot red peculiar to the Anderson gang, and curly. His eyes were large and luminous, and of a light-blue color.

Thad somehow at once associated the boy with the woman he had seen on Fifty-second street, although he could not explain why.

Meanwhile the boy had been busy surveying the room and its contents. Finally his great, wide, wondering eyes, in their wandering, met those of the detective, and caused the little chap to start, and apparently suddenly recollect where he was, and what he had come there for. He colored a little and looked embarrassed, but appeared to be unable to begin his speech—whatever it was to be.

Thad saw his dilemma and came to his relief.

"Well, my boy," he began, "what did you wish to speak to me about?"

The boy surveyed the detective's countenance curiously for a moment, and then said:

"You're the same gent that was at the house to-night, aren't you, sir?"

Thad was reminded by this question that he had been disguised when he was at Hell's Kitchen and that he was at the present moment disguised, but so differently that he wondered the boy had recognized him as the same person.

"Yes," he replied; "but how did you know that I was the same person, my boy?"

"I partly guessed it," was answered. "I heard them say at the house that you were disguised, and then I followed you up to your room here and waited in the hall till you came out, and, although you looked different, I was pretty sure it was you."

"I see. You are pretty cunning for a youngster. But, what did you want to speak to me about?"

"Why," said the boy with a sudden inspiration, as though he had again forgotten his mission, "you heard what was said about Packey, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is Packey Lynch. He often comes to the house."

"I see. Well, what do you know about him, my lad? Has he returned to the house?"

"No, sir, and he ain't likely to."

"Do you know where he is?"

The boy hesitated a moment, and finally said: "I can take you to the place, but not to-night."

"When can you?"

"To-morrow, maybe. I'll let you know. You see, they are watching awful close."

"Very well. What else do you know about this man?"

"I know that he was Sal's man."

"Yes?" and the detective was growing interested. "Did he intend to marry the woman, as the Tank intimated?"

"Naw!" cried Jimmie, with an ironical chuckle. "Nobody'd 'a' married her. He was just her man. See?"

"I understand. But, why was Packey jealous of Maher? Was he trying to cut him out?"

At the mention of Maher the boy shuddered and his pallid face became clouded as with sorrow.

"I don't think so," he finally answered. "I think—I know it was something else."

"How do you know?"

"I heard Packey talking to Bull and old Hawkins one day, and Packey said he thought the best way to get rid of any one was to drop something into his liquor, and Bull said that if it was him he'd be a man, and use a gun like a man. Packey said there was so much risk, and Bull said that he could afford to run a pretty big risk for five thousand dollars."

"Do you know whom they were talking about?"

"I didn't then, but I afterward heard Packey tell her that the next time she saw Shang Maher she had better bid him good-by, as it would probably be the last chance she would ever have. She asked him what he meant, and he only wagged his head. She wasn't satisfied with that and kept at him until he finally said: 'Wal, if yer must know, Shang's liable to go t'ell one of these fine days quicker'n scat.' She asked him what for, and he got mad and told her that it was none of her business."

"What did you understand by the five thousand dollars mentioned by Bull Anderson?"

"I didn't know what it meant, unless that Shang had that much money and Packey wanted it."

"Do you think he had it?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"He never had any money hardly—except when some of his friends gave him some. He had rheumatism and couldn't work, then when he did get any he would gamble it away."

"Who gave him money, the Andersons?"

"No, they wouldn't have given him any if he was starving. In fact, when he would be without money for a long time and get in debt to the king, the king would tell him that if he didn't pay up he would have to get out. Then Shang would almost cry—sometimes he would cry like a child—and say: 'Where am I to get any money?' and the king would laugh at him and say: 'What's de matter wid de ole woman? Can't yer pull her leg ag'in?'"

"Who was the old woman?"

"I don't know, sir; but I always supposed it was his mother or some of his relations. I had understood he had some wealthy relations somewhere."

This last revelation set the detective to thinking.

There was unquestionably some connection between what he had just heard, the detective decided, and the transaction he had witnessed on Fifty-second street that very night. But, what the connection was he could not surmise.

Was it possible that the woman whom he had seen talking to Bull Anderson and old Hawkins was a relative of the dead man, and that, weary of furnishing him financial assistance, she had had him put away as a means of putting an end to the drain?

The theory looked plausible; but if it was the correct one, Bull and old Hawkins were implicated in the conspiracy also.

"You do not know where these relatives live, my boy?" he finally asked.

"No, sir."

"Do you know whether they lived in the city or not?"

"I think they did, for when he went to get money he was not long in getting back."

"Did he always get it?"

"No, sir, not always. Sometimes he would come back and say that the rocster was on the nest."

"What did he mean by that?"

"I don't know, only I suppose he meant there was somebody in the way."

"How came you to come here and tell me these things, my boy?"

"I want the murderers punished, sir."

"Why?"

"Because Shang Maher was my father."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROKER'S SURPRISE.

THE boy's last statement was the greatest surprise the detective had yet received, and he stared at the little fellow in blank amazement, almost incredulously.

It did not appear possible that so bright and handsome a child could be the offspring of such a parent as he imagined Maher to be. But then he thought that, possibly, the child's mother was a refined and beautiful woman.

"So he was your father, was he, my boy?" said Thad, half musingly, at length.

"Yes, sir!" answered the boy, sadly.

"Where is your mother?"

"I haven't got any, sir."

"Dead, eh?"

"I don't know—maybe."

"You have seen her, of course?"

"Not that I remember."

"How long have you lived in Hell's Kitchen?"

"I don't know."

"Do you remember when you went there?"

"Yes, sir, but it seems a long time ago."

"Where did you live before you went there?"

"I don't know where it was, but it was in a fine house and the folks were different from those in Hell's Kitchen. They wore nice clothes and were kind and gentle and didn't swear and drink whisky."

"How came you to go to Hell's Kitchen?"

"They took me."

"Who?"

"I don't know who it was. I only remember that I was playing on the front stoop of the house when a carriage drove up and a man jumped out, ran up the stoop and picked me up in his arms and put me inside of the carriage and then got in himself. Then the carriage drove off and the next thing I remember is being in a filthy place, surrounded by dirty, drunken people. I remember that they took my nice clothes off and put on a suit of rags something like this I now have on."

"Don't you remember of seeing your mother at the fine house?"

"No, sir. I don't think she was there. I remember, though, that one woman was my aunt and one man was my uncle."

"Do you remember whether your father lived there or not?"

"I know he didn't, but he used to come sometimes."

"Did you see him as soon as you got to Hell's Kitchen?"

"I don't remember when I first saw him there. The first thing I remember about him is one night when Mary Ann Anderson had been whipping me with a barrel-stave, he took me in his arms and cried, too, and said, 'Poor boy. We are both badly treated in this place.'"

"Why did he remain there if he was badly treated?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why do you remain?"

"Because I've no place else to go. Besides, if I should go away the king or some of his men would find me and they would be sure to kill me when they did."

"Why should they wish to kill you?"

"Because I know too much about the doings of Hell's Kitchen. Why, if I should tell all I know of what has passed there, there would be trouble for all of them."

"Did you ever see anybody killed?"

"Yes, sir; I saw Dab Carroll beat a woman to death with a bale-stick, and I saw Dutch Harmon stab another in the stomach with an old saber."

"Are you not afraid that they will make trouble with you for coming here?"

"They will if they find it out."

"Didn't you know that before you came?"

"Yes, sir; but I was willing to risk anything to have the murder of my father avenged."

"You're a brave lad. But do you know it is almost morning?" said the detective, consulting his watch. "You had better lie down here on this lounge and have a sleep and I will arrange to slip you out in the morning."

"Oh, no, sir," protested the boy, starting for the door. "I must get back!"

"Will you be able to get into the house unobserved?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Very well, then. Let me know as soon as it is possible for you to take me to where Packey Lynch is."

"I will, sir."

"And here is a dollar for you," said the detective, handing him a coin. "Good-night or rather, good-morning."

"Good-night, sir. Thank you." And the little fellow slid out of the door like a shadow.

Although it was not far from daylight when Thad got to bed, he did not allow much of the forenoon to pass before he was stirring.

As soon as he had breakfasted he dressed himself in his best suit, and taking the Elevated train, soon found himself at Rector street, corner of Greenwich. From here it was but a few minutes' walk to Wall, between New and Broad streets, where he entered the brokerage establishment of Haskell, Van Werth & Co. An inquiry for Mr. Julius Van Werth caused the detective to be shown into that gentleman's private office.

Mr. Van Werth, whom he found to be a very courteous gentleman, was seated at his desk, and when Thad had made himself known the banker politely invited him to be seated.

"I see that you are a detective," said the gentleman, referring to the card given him. "What can I do for you? I hope you do not suspect that we have had any robberies here?"

"I not only do not suspect anything of the kind, sir," replied the detective, laughing, "but I sincerely trust that I shall never have cause to. What I desire to speak to you about, Mr. Van Werth, concerns you personally, and has nothing whatever to do with your firm."

Mr. Van Werth, who was a middle-aged man, with a florid complexion, and wore a perpetual smile, paled just the least trifle and looked a little serious at this announcement.

"Why, what on earth can you have to do with me, sir?" he cried, a little startled. "I hope I am suspected of no crime."

"You are not, sir." Here the detective lowered his voice and cast his eyes about the room. "Are we alone?" said he. "Can we speak in confidence, without being overheard?"

"Certainly. This is my private office in every sense of the word. You need have no fear of speaking in perfect confidence."

"Well, to begin with, Mr. Van Werth, have you any domestic—any woman—in your employ, whom you have the least cause to suspect of being not quite straight?"

"What do you mean—in the matter of honesty?"

"Not that exactly. Do you, or have you ever, had reason to suspect any one of being in league with improper persons outside of your establishment?"

"Why, no, certainly not. You astonish me, sir." And the gentleman's countenance bore out the assertion. "I am at a loss to know what you mean. Please explain."

"So I will." And the detective gave a detailed account of what he had witnessed the previous evening on Fifty-second street.

The banker was dumfounded.

"Are you sure that the woman came out of my house?" he asked, with a perplexed countenance.

"Perfectly," responded Thad. "And if I had had any doubt about it, the fact of the fellow handing in a note at your door would have been enough to dispel it."

The banker was silent and reflective for some moments, and then continued:

"Well, sir, I shall investigate this matter without delay. If the fellow gave the note to my hall-boy he will remember it, and also remember whom he gave it to."

"Excuse me, sir," said the detective, "but will you allow me to make a suggestion?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"Instead of investigating this matter yourself, suppose you allow me to do it. I have more experience—if you will permit me to say so—in such matters; besides I have a special motive in desiring to do so. This matter, if I mistake not, is directly connected with a case upon which I am at work, so that in helping you I am merely helping myself."

Mr. Van Werth surveyed the young man's countenance critically for some moments, and then said, as though answering his own mental inquiry:

"Yes, I can trust you. What is your plan?"

"To go to your house fully introduced and recommended by yourself, so that I can speak with perfect frankness about the subject to your wife, who may know more of the internal economy of your establishment than yourself, and obtain permission of her to question the servants. This I have found to be the simplest and most direct way of handling cases of this kind."

"Very well, sir. I will give you a letter of introduction to my wife and let you see what you can make out of it. Certainly if there is anything of this kind going on in my house I want to know it."

With that the banker turned to his desk and wrote a letter to his wife introducing Mr. Thaddeus Burr, Detective, and briefly outlining the case upon which he desired to obtain light. Folding the note and putting into an envelope directed to his wife, the gentleman turned and handed it to the detective with the request:

"As soon as you have made any progress in the matter I wish you would let me know. You are going directly to the house, I presume?"

"I am. Yes, sir, I shall keep you posted as to my progress. Good-morning." And the detective took his leave.

Armed with the letter of introduction to Mrs. Van Werth, Thad took an uptown train, and was soon at the Fifty-second street residence, where he sent in his card, and was promptly ushered into the drawing-room.

Having to wait for some time, the detective took occasion to look about him.

He could not help but compare the luxurious furniture and costly paintings, etc., which he saw about him, to the squalor of the den on Eleventh avenue, and to wonder what anybody in that palatial abode of wealth could have to do with the denizens of Hell's Kitchen.

It did not seem possible that any one in this house could be mixed up in the affairs or with the inmates of the den of thieves mentioned, but if such was the case, it was hard to fathom the

depths of iniquity to which the dwellers behind the gilded walls of Gotham could plunge upon occasion.

In vain did the detective try to divest his mind of the thought of such a thing being possible. Something seemed to tell him that the secret of the horrible mystery was to be found in this house of wealth and fashion.

But after a time his reverie was disturbed by the entrance of a tall, handsome lady, who announced that she was Mrs. Van Werth, and demanded to know, in a most polite and gentle manner to what she was indebted for the detective's call.

As yet she was not aware that he was a detective, however, and in response to her question Thad simply handed her the letter of introduction from her husband.

While she was perusing the letter the detective took occasion to scrutinize the lady herself.

He saw that she was not only remarkably beautiful and intellectual in appearance, but that she was young—certainly not more than twenty-five; and that while her expression was frank and open, there was a just perceptible cloud of sadness, apparently indicative of some past sorrow or present apprehension.

Her eyes were large and of a gentle blue color and her hair a soft brown with an inclination to curl. Upon the whole, there was something about the face that reminded the detective of some one he had seen, and to associate itself with something sad and pathetic.

When she first began the perusal of the note the lady appeared to be startled and changed color slightly. But, this was only temporary. A moment later she had completely recovered her self-possession, and when she had finished reading, she carefully refolded the note and, raising her great beautiful eyes to the detective's face, smiled pleasantly, and observed:

"I see by my husband's note that you belong to the Secret Service, sir, and that you suspect some of our domestics of complicity with outside parties of questionable character. What, may I ask, has given rise to this suspicion on your part?"

"It is not merely suspicion, madam," rejoined the detective earnestly. "I have the evidence of my own eyes."

Thad then gave her a detailed and graphic account of what he had witnessed the night before.

The lady listened attentively to the narration, but, what puzzled the detective was that it appeared to make no impression whatever upon her! So far as any change of countenance was concerned, he might just as well have been addressing a marble statue.

She appeared to have even lost what little interest she had at first manifested in the affair, and had grown completely indifferent. However, at the conclusion of the recital she asked in a matter-of-fact way:

"Did you see the woman's face?"

"Unfortunately I did not, madam," replied the detective. "If I had my task would be easy."

"I presume she took the precaution to veil her face. Was there anything else about her—her figure, her carriage, her clothing—by which you would be likely to recognize her again?"

"I might possibly recognize her walk, but I am not absolutely certain even of that. She was in a great hurry, and the briskness of her movements would in a great measure disguise her natural carriage. And as for clothing, there was nothing peculiar about that, except that she was dressed completely in black, just as every second woman you might meet would be. No, there was absolutely nothing about the person herself by which I could identify her, and I must therefore depend upon other evidence."

"What, for instance?" in the same indifferent tone.

"Well, there is the hall-boy. Inasmuch as he received the note handed in by the man, he cannot fail to know to whom it was addressed. A little talk with him will probably throw some light upon the subject."

"Possibly," dreamily.

"You have no objection, I presume, to my catechizing him?"

"None whatever."

The lady touched a bell, and the next moment a liveried lackey entered the room.

"Tell James to come here," commanded the lady, without raising her eyes from the carpet, where she had kept them for some time past.

The menial retired, and in a few minutes the attendant whom Thad had seen at the door entered.

"James," said the lady, still without raising her eyes, "did you receive a note for any one in this house last night?"

"No'm," replied the lackey, with a bow.

"Are you sure, James?"

"Quite sure, mum."

"You could not have overlooked the fact, or have forgotten, for instance, if any one had called any time in the evening, especially late in the evening, and handed you a note, could you?"

"No'm."

"Refresh your memory, James," continued

the lady, apparently becoming interested in the subject. "You know you are sometimes apt to forget little matters of that kind. You are quite sure that no one gave you a note to deliver to some one in the house, are you, James?"

"Yes'm."

"That will do. You may go. I trust," she continued, after the attendant had retired, addressing the detective, "that this satisfies you that no note was handed into this house, and that you were mistaken in your theory."

With that she arose to leave the room.

CHAPTER V.

MISLEADING CLUES.

As Mrs. Van Werth arose to quit the room. Thad also sprang to his feet.

"Pardon me, madam," he interposed. "I hope you will not go just yet."

She turned and surveyed him coldly for a few seconds, and then shrugged her shoulders after the manner of a person who is being terribly bored and sees no way of escaping.

"Well?" she said, languidly.

"First of all, I wish to ask your permission to interrogate the servant in private. After which—"

"With pleasure," she answered icily, and again essayed to leave the room.

"I beg your pardon, madam," interposed the detective quickly. "I did not mean that you should leave the room, or that our interview should terminate. I merely thought that I might withdraw into another apartment with the hall-boy for a few minutes. After which I desired to consult—"

"As I see no reason why the interview should be prolonged," interrupted the lady coldly, "I prefer to withdraw. Good-morning!"

And she swept out of the room.

The detective was struck dumb by the lady's conduct, but he soon recovered, and began to consider what was best to be done. He was left alone in the drawing-room, and as his mind ran over the situation rapidly, his eyes instinctively turned to the electric bell which he had seen the lady touch, and in response to which the lackey had appeared. His first thought on noticing the bell was to follow her example. But would the servant be likely to obey him, a stranger? And besides, if this woman was guilty of anything—and her conduct had certainly indicated that she was—would she not post the servants not to answer or obey his orders?

His only course, then, seemed to be to go in search of the flunkey and take him unawares. But just as he arrived at this conclusion, the hall-boy reappeared and stood like a statue apparently awaiting the detective's orders.

After regarding the marionette-like creature who had no more expression in his face than a French doll, and scarcely more animation, for some moments, Thad addressed him:

"James," he began in an impressive voice, which was calculated to have its effect upon the menial, "I want you to answer honestly and truthfully what I am going to ask you. You need have no fear of telling the truth, while if you answer falsely I will find it out and it will go hard with you."

"Yes, sir," responded the hall-boy, without moving a muscle of his face.

"Were you attending the door last night?"

"Yes, sir," he answered in the same automatic fashion.

"About what time did you answer the bell for the last time?"

"Dunno, sir."

"Was it as late as, or a little later than, midnight?"

"Dunno, sir."

Thad saw that the fellow would have to be intimidated before he could be made to tell the truth, as he was evidently merely repeating what had been told him like a parrot.

So, assuming a severe mein, the detective went on:

"Look here, James, do you know that I can have you locked up and brought before a judge who will compel you to answer these questions?"

And Thad arose and approached the menial in a threatening manner, looking him straight in the eye.

The lackey evinced a little alarm at this, turned a trifle pale, and his stolid face twitched slightly, but he managed to pull himself together, shrugged his shoulders and answered in the same exasperating monosyllable:

"Dunno."

"Well, I can," rejoined Thad, "and I will unless you answer my questions truthfully."

But what were threats like these to a man whose business was to lie to every second person who rung the bell?

The fellow knew that his situation depended upon his replying to the detective's questions in a manner that would be satisfactory to his mistress, and he felt safe in the assurance that she would see him through in case he got into trouble.

Thad realized this almost from the first; but it seemed his only hope of a clue—if, indeed, the

call at the house by the ruffians had any connection with the murder, and so he gathered courage.

If he had had any flickering doubt of the fact that somebody in this house was guilty, the actions of the flunkey were enough to dispel them.

Assuming a severer manner than ever, therefore, the detective continued:

"Now, answer me," grasping James's lapel, "did not a man call here some time after twelve o'clock last night, and hand you a note?"

"Sev'ral people called an' handed me notes," replied the servant.

"But not all at that hour?"

"No, sir."

"Well, do you remember of one calling as late as I mention, and handing you a note for some woman in the house?"

At that moment the mistress of the house suddenly reappeared, and without excusing herself, or even deigning to notice the detective, approached the hall-boy and whispered something in his ear.

The latter brightened up a little, and became a trifle more animated. Meanwhile the lady had vanished as unceremoniously as she had appeared.

As soon as the door closed behind her the servant said:

"I do recollect now that summon 'anded me a note for the 'ousekeeper."

"Ah, I'm glad you managed to recall the circumstance," cried Thad, sarcastically. "Your memory is none of the best, is it?"

"No, sir, hit's hawful bad at times, sir."

"So I remark. You say this note was for the housekeeper?"

"Yessir."

Thad reflected a moment, and then pursued:

"And you gave it to her, did you?"

"Yessir."

"Will you call the housekeeper for me, James?"

"Hit's not my place, sir."

"Well, would you mind telling some one whose place it is?"

The menial withdrew, and after a long wait the housekeeper put in an appearance. She was a middle-aged, stern-looking woman of unmistakable Irish extraction, and she bustled into the room as though she had come to devour some one.

"Are yez the detective?" she demanded, facing that gentleman with her arms akimbo and her head very much on one side.

"That is my unfortunate calling," answered Thad, unable to suppress a smile.

"Onfortynit, is it?" cried she. "Faix, an' Oi think as much, whin yez go 'bout puttin' yer nose into other payple's business. Phwat d'ye want av me?"

"The hall boy informs me that you received a note last night some time after twelve o'clock."

"Shure, Oi did, an' phwat's that till yez, Oi'd loike to know?"

"Would you mind telling me whom that note was from?"

"Bad 'cess t'yer imperence! Phwat d'yez want to know that for? Shure, it was from me own coozin Mickey McFadden."

"I see. Did you leave the house a short time afterward for the purpose of meeting your cousin at the corner of Fourth avenue?"

"Wurra, an' phwat d'ye leavin' me a question loike that for? Shure an' Oi'm a daycint woman, an' wu'dn't be gallyvantin' about the strays at wan o'clock in the marnin'!"

And without another word she flounced out of the room.

Seeing that nothing was to be gained by remaining longer at that time, the detective prepared to take his departure. As he was about passing out the door his eye fell upon a bit of paper folded very small tucked away in one corner of the hall back of the door, and picked it up, fortunately without observation.

Although the detective thought there might be something to be learned from the note when he picked it up—enough, indeed, to pay him for preserving it, his mind was so much perturbed by his late failure that the moment he got outside the door he folded the paper and put it absently into his pocket without so much as looking at it.

In fact, so much was he absorbed in his own reflections as he hurried along, that he did not notice a man who stood on the next corner and who eyed him narrowly as he hastened by.

When he reached the opposite corner, however, the detective looked back vacantly for some cause which he himself could not have explained, and when he saw that the man was still gazing intently at him, his curiosity was aroused. He could not tell why, but somehow he instinctively associated the man with the woman whom he had just left, and also in a vague way with the occurrence of the night before.

Thad had seen enough of him, however, to be able to identify him if occasion required it, at any future time.

He was tall, dark and handsomely dressed, and bore other marks of gentility, but it was that species of gentility that one is at a loss to

tell whether it belongs to good society or to the fortunate blackleg who apes good society. There was, withal, an expression in the man's face which was difficult to interpret. It might have been the result of business troubles and disappointment, or the shadow which a life of crime leaves upon its victim.

At all events, Thad was at once attracted by, and interested in, the man who had so suddenly disappeared around the corner, and he determined to follow him and see where he went.

A step from where he stood brought the detective in a position where he could plainly see the receding figure, which had by this time got nearly half a block away, and he started after him.

The man seemed to have no suspicion that he was being followed, for he pushed on at a rapid gait without turning his head in Thad's direction. He was going down Madison avenue, and he kept up his rapid walk for the distance of several blocks, when suddenly he stopped before a residence, ascended the stoop, took a key from his pocket, opened the door and went in.

Thad was somewhat disappointed, for it appeared impossible to follow the man any further, and he was about to give up the chase.

As he walked down the avenue, ruminating upon the incident, however, and wondering who the fellow was, and what had caused him to act in the strange manner he did, the detective concluded to retrace his steps and watch the house for a little while.

Returning to a convenient position where he had a full view of the residence into which his man had disappeared, without incurring any risk of being discovered himself, Thad waited for a long time, keeping his eyes on the front of the house, so that no one could come or go without his seeing him.

Possibly an hour went by in this way, and nothing had occurred to arouse his suspicions, and, lost in thought as he had become, his watch had become merely mechanical. He had forgotten what he had posted himself there for, or, indeed, where he was, when he was suddenly aroused from his reverie by a familiar voice addressing him by name.

"Hullo, Thad!" came the voice. "What are you onto now? Found a bird on the net, and watching for it to fly so that you can wing it?"

Thad started as out of a dream, and looked nervously around at the speaker with an expression of annoyance.

To his astonishment the detective beheld his old friend Augustus Nevin, a somewhat reckless young blade who had run through with two or three fortunes, and who was known, aside from being a prime good fellow, for his penchant for borrowing money from every friend he met.

"Hello, Nevin!" was the detective's salutation, without paying any heed to the other's question. "What are you doing here? I thought you were dead long ago."

"Not a bit of it! Never say die, say I! Couldn't afford it now, anyway. Old aunt—loving old creature with a weakness for cats and a pennyroyal breath, just kicked the bucket and left me her little all. Matter of fifty thousand. Got a ten about you?"

"Yes, if you need it, Nev," rejoined Thad, taking out a roll of bills. "How much?"

"Not a cent," was the surprising reply. "Just a habit of mine. If I neglected it, my friends would think I was slighting them. But you haven't answered my question. What are you watching over at that house yonder?"

Thad briefly related the circumstances of the man watching him and of his (the detective's) following him until he disappeared into the house in question.

Nevin laughed.

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?" he inquired in his customary languid way. "Tall, dark, natty, looks like he had just lost on a horse or stolen a sheep?"

"That hits him off to a T," responded Thad, laughing. "Do you know him?"

"Know him?" ejaculated Nevin in his squeaky voice. "Know everybody. Better for me, maybe, if I didn't know so many—or better for everybody if they didn't know me. That's Ned McDermot. Dev'lish good fellow, don't you know, although his appearance is against him. Tough on a fellow to have to carry a face like his around with him. Why, sir, when we used to be around the wings and green-room a good deal—that's years ago, and I was little more than a boy then—the actors used to tell Ned that he ought to go on the stage as a heavy-man, as he could play first villain without making up a bit. But Ned's a good fellow, and—"

"Every fellow is a good fellow in your mind, Nevin," interrupted Thad, impatiently. "Every man that will buy you a bottle of wine or help you drink the one you have bought. But, what do you know about the man's private life? Is he as square as you imagine him to be?"

"Square as a die. Ask any of the boys down at Phil Daly's or any of the places."

"In other words, he pays his gambling debts, and therefore is in your eyes, as well as those of every other gambler, a square fellow. But do you know that he would not bunco a greenhorn if there was enough in it, or shove a bill of ques—"

tionable character, or any other little trick which would bring him a comfortable sum without earning it? Do you know this, Nevin?"

Nevin colored up, and came the nearest to getting real angry that Thad had ever seen him. "Certainly I do!" he almost screeched in his thin, piping voice. "Why, what are you coming at, Thad? By thunder, if you were not the good fellow that you are, by Jove, I'd—"

"No, you wouldn't do anything. Now, look here, Nevin, the fact is that because you are a good fellow yourself you imagine every fellow to be. In my honest opinion this fellow McDermot's looks do not belie his character in the least."

"What do you mean?"

"That he is a double-dyed villain, and I propose to prove it to you—if I am not very much mistaken—inside of a month."

Nevin stared at the detective with distended mouth for several minutes before he could recover his voice.

"How do you propose to do it?" he finally gasped.

"I am going to ask you to assist me in the work."

"Me?"

"Yes. Do you remember helping me to discover the villainy of one of your so-called good fellows some years ago?"

"Curtis?"

"Yes."

"I do remember it, now that you mention it. Let me see," reflectively. "I believe I used to think that he was a bigger fool than I was, didn't I?"

"I believe you did. But about this man McDermot. You know him intimately, do you not?"

"Just as I know everybody."

"Very well. I want you to smuggle me into his house in some way, you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, old fellow, and I'll do it just for the fun. Meet me at the hotel to-morrow night and I'll have a plan by that time."

"Good." And the two friends separated.

CHAPTER VI.

SHEENY IKE'S GHOST.

It was late in the afternoon when Thad got to his lodgings, and he sat down to reflect upon what move to make next.

He was disappointed with the result of his morning's work, for he had expected to accomplish a great deal by the interview with the Van Werths, whereas he had accomplished next to nothing. This was the detective's own estimate of it; but as a matter of fact he had accomplished a great deal. For one thing, he had formulated a theory, though he did not realize it at that time. It was that Mrs. Van Werth herself and not any of her domestics, was the person whom he had seen come out of the house on the previous evening to meet Bull Anderson and old Hawkins. But as he gave the theory no thought at that time he did not stop to ask himself why she, of all persons, should have done such a thing, and in what way she was probably mixed up in the uncanny affairs of Hell's Kitchen.

The detective's mind was upon other matters just then. First of all, he was wondering how soon the boy Jimmie would come to conduct him to the hiding-place of Packey Lynch; and in the second place, he was contemplating a second visit to Hell's Kitchen. Finally the latter took complete possession of him, and he began to consider the best disguise to adopt for the expedition.

He finally remembered a character whom he had seen loitering about Hell's Kitchen at various times when his business had called him into that neighborhood. He remembered that the fellow was about his own size and build, except that he was somewhat bent, and that he had a colorless complexion and jet black hair and a full beard of the same hue. He now recalled the fact that he had not seen the fellow about during his last visit, but he did not wonder at that so much as that he should have thought of him above any of the others, and that the man's image should have appeared before his mental eye with such vividness. He recalled every detail of the strange being, every lineament of his face and every gesture, his peculiar, shuffling gait, his baggy clothes, his expression of settled melancholy, and the nasal tone of his voice.

The detective's mind was made up at once. He would disguise himself as this miserable *habitué* of the Anderson den, believing that he would have little trouble in passing himself off for the original. There would be but one risk, and that would be the possibility of the other fellow being there; and the young man decided to hazard that.

Having all the necessary material, he went to work, and at the end of half an hour he was startled himself at the result. He could scarcely have distinguished his own reflection in the mirror from the original character.

It had grown dark by this time, but it was still too early to start, and he sat down to read an evening paper; but he had scarcely glanced

at the first article when he recollected the note he had picked up in the Van Werth mansion, and had not yet opened. He did not imagine that it would amount to anything, but his anxiety prompted him to jump up and take it from the pocket of the coat he had then worn.

The note was scrawled in an ignorant hand, horribly misspelled, and being written with a dim lead-pencil, was almost illegible. When he finally succeeded in deciphering it, he found that it ran as follows:

"DIER LOTTIE

"The time haz cum & yo must full fill yer prom-mis Pack's in riddin & cant do it his self so weeve goter do it ferrim. cum out ter the cor-er uv 4th ave & tuentys-kon st & ile Be thar with fren. doant fale ef yer dew yewl heer fom us & so wil Sum-buddy eils which yo wuddent hev no fer morn 5 thossan dollar yourn trooly Yo No Hoo."

This set the detective to reflecting. The note was undoubtedly from Bull Anderson or old Hawkins, and was just as certainly addressed to some one in the house on Fifty-second street, but who? He recalled the name by which Mr. Van Werth had addressed his wife, which was Ida; that point appeared to be settled. The lady was not, as he had half suspected, the guilty one. But, who could Lottie be? Again, why had Mrs. Van Werth evinced such an unmistakable desire to keep the detective from learning anything concerning the mystery? There was a profound mystery about the whole affair, and, after the reception he had had before, the detective was almost in despair of ever unraveling it.

He must have mused over the matter for a long time, for when he consulted his watch he found that it was eight o'clock, and he knew it was time for him to start for Hell's Kitchen.

He had just reached the hall and was locking his door when he heard some one ascending the stairs. It was too dark in the hallway to see any one, and as he knew that nobody would come up the stairs except to see him (the floor above being vacant), the detective determined to see who it was. So he struck a match and held it up.

To his surprise and delight he beheld the diminutive form of Jimmie.

He smiled benignantly at the boy and was about to address him, when, to his utter astonishment, the lad first looked up at him curiously, and then his pallid face assumed an expression of horror, and, uttering a shriek of terror, the lad turned and bounded down the stairs as fast as his little legs would carry him.

The detective did not know what to make of such conduct. Certainly if his make-up was as faithful a likeness of the original as it had appeared to the detective himself, the boy ought to have recognized it as the original and not been frightened.

Then a suspicion occurred to Thad. Possibly the boy had seen the original the last thing before leaving the house and was frightened at seeing his double! If this was the case, the detective's scheme would be spoiled.

However, after a little reflection, he decided to risk it and descended the stairs.

When he reached the corner of the street opposite Hell's Kitchen the detective noticed that there was quite a crowd of men and women straggling into the den, each one carrying a bag, bundle or parcel of some description.

The truth flashed on him at once. These people, the hangers-on of Hell's Kitchen, were either thieves or beggars or both, and they were bringing in the result of their day's harvest.

Without delay he returned to his room and, procuring a bag, filled it with whatever loose article of little value he found lying about.

Thus prepared he made his way again directly to Hell's Kitchen.

There was such a crowd of nondescript humanity when he entered the large room on the ground floor where the king was examining the contents of each comer's parcel in turn, that nobody paid any attention to the detective, who had squeezed into a corner.

Each one was intent upon his own affairs. Such a haggling and brawling over the articles brought in, Thad had never witnessed. As the contents of a parcel were taken out the king would put a price upon it, which was usually disputed by the owner, and then a wrangle would ensue. The king had a way of bringing the grumblers to time, however, which was to chuck the articles back into the bag with the laconic remark: "Git outen hiar den!" which always had the effect of cooling the disputant down, unless he or she had happened to be a little the worse for liquor, in which case the quarrel might be prolonged for awhile; but it ultimately turned out in the king's favor, when he would shell out the pittance at which he had invoiced the articles, and the poor wretch would pocket it and slink away grumbling.

The king sat behind a large table upon which the plunder was dumped for his inspection; his daughter Mag stood beside him and as fast as he passed upon a batch the girl would rake it off into a large basket on the floor behind the table, except in the case of watches, jewelry and the like, which she stored away in a pouch slung at her side.

In the center of the table was a smoky

kerosene lamp, which furnished all the light there was in the room; and as it only illuminated the top of the table and a very limited radius around it, the balance of the room was in shadow.

This accounted in part for the crowd failing to notice the detective. As the crowd in front of him moved up toward the table and allowed him to approach it, however, the light finally fell upon him, but only enough to show him dimly and make him appear more ghastly than if he had been in a strong light.

Just at this time one of the motley crew—a woman—who had been unusually mutinous, being half intoxicated, had finally finished her transaction with the king and was about to turn away from the table when her eye accidentally fell upon the detective. The next instant she leaped into the air and let off a shriek that was enough to raise one's hair.

"W'at's de row?" growled the king, jumping up and peering in the direction.

But by that time half a dozen others were staring at him with wild eyes and faces white with terror.

"My God!" groaned one old bag, "its Sheeny Ike's ghost!" and hobbled out of the room as fast as her rheumatic old limbs would permit.

This was the signal for a general stampede, and in less than a minute not a soul remained in the room except the king and Mag, both of whom were still peering in the vain attempt to get a view of him from where they stood.

Thad realized the situation; and to help matters along, advanced to the table and carelessly threw down his bag of plunder.

Then the king and his daughter for the first time caught a full view of the supposed ghost of the murdered Jew (as it afterward turned out that Sheeny Ike had been murdered), and their faces assumed an expression of the most abject terror.

Mag shrieked and, throwing her apron over her head, fled from the room, but her father seemed transfixed with fright.

"Go way!" he cried in a trembling voice. "It wasn't me as killed yer, it was Dutch Harmon and Butch! Go 'way!"

"That's all right, mine friendt," cried Thad, in a nasal voice. "I only vants to tell ye that the chost of Shang Maber vill pe along burty soon!"

That was enough. The king waited to hear no more, but fled from the room.

When the detective found himself alone in the big room at last, he concluded that the best thing he could do was to take his departure also.

As he made his way back to his lodgings he reflected that he had made another fruitless expedition. That, aside from having a little fun and discovering that a murder had been committed in the dreadful den which the public had never heard anything about, this expedition had been as lacking of results as the one he had made in the morning.

But when he had reached the street-door leading into the hallway, of his lodging-house, which by this time had been locked, he found Jimmie crouched down in a bunch in one corner waiting for him.

It was so dark that the boy could only see an outline of him, and he could discern no more of the boy.

He could make out the outlines of a figure as the little fellow arose out of his corner and he knew in reason that it could be no one else but Jimmie. And when he addressed the boy the latter recognized his voice.

"Well, Jimmie," he said, "have you come to take me to Packey Lynch's hiding-place?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy; "but we'll have to wait till midnight before we go. I came away now because there was a row over at the house, which gave me a chance to steal out. If I had waited till later I might not have got the chance."

Thad could hardly suppress his laughter at Jimmie's mention of the row, for he knew what the nature of it was.

"What was the row, Jimmie?" he asked innocently.

"Oh, it was the greatest thing you ever saw," averred the boy as he also entered the dark hall. "The mugs, as the king calls the beggars and cracks that bring their goods to him, were nearly all in, and most of them had delivered their goods, when all of a sudden who should turn up but the ghost of Sheeny Ike, and such a scattering you never saw in all your life."

"Who was Sheeny Ike, my boy?"

"He was a sneak" (the thugs' designation of a sneak-thief) "who used to do business with the king, and last summer he prigged a lot of valuable diamonds somewhere, and when he offered them to the king he would only offer the old man as much as he was used to giving him for paste and brilliants. The Jew knew the value of them, and wouldn't give them up, so that night the king or some of his men murdered the Jew and took the diamonds."

"What did they do with the body?" asked the detective.

"They carried it down to North River and threw it in."

"Was nothing ever heard about it?"

"No, sir, I believe not. I heard them say

that there was an ebb-tide, and "he body was carried out to sea and was probably washed in at some other point."

By this time they had got inside the room, and the detective lighted the gas.

The moment the light fell upon Thad's ghastly visage, the boy uttered a cry of terror and started to run away, but the detective stepped between him and the door, and laughingly said:

"Why, Jimmie, what's the matter? Don't you know me?"

The boy looked at him with a horrified expression, and appeared unable to speak.

"It is only I, the detective, my boy," he went on in a kindly voice. "You certainly recognize my voice if nothing else."

"Yes, sir," answered the lad in tremulous tones, "your voice sounds familiar, but your face looks like that of Sheeny Ike."

"Well, I am not Sheeny Ike, but merely the detective made up to resemble him."

"It—it was you that was over at the house then, was it, sir?" faltered the boy, smiling faintly.

"That's who it was," laughed the detective.

"And it was you I saw coming out of here awhile ago, was it?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad it was. I was sure it was a ghost. I was never so frightened in my life."

"How did it happen that you were not afraid to come back and sit down on the step below?"

"Why, when I heard the ghost was at the house I knew it couldn't be here; besides, I knew that I shouldn't be afraid while I was with you, sir."

Thad was about to remove his disguise, but upon second thought he concluded to keep it on and make his visit to Packey Lynch in that disguise, and so he pulled a chair up to the stove and entered into conversation with Jimmie regarding the history of Hell's Kitchen.

The boy had so many stories about the horrors of that infamous den that the time flew rapidly and the detective was so deeply absorbed that he lost all reckoning of time.

Thus they were engaged, oblivious to everything else when some time near midnight they were suddenly aroused by a heavy knock at the door.

Both of them jumped to their feet and Jimmie turned as white as a sheet.

"I wonder who it is!" he gasped.

The question was a puzzling one for the detective.

He could think of nobody that would be likely to call upon him at any time, and more especially at that time of night. Certainly none of his friends knew the location of his room, and somehow his mind reverted to the Anderson gang.

"Jimmie," he said quickly, "in my opinion it is somebody from Hell's Kitchen. Open the door and stand behind it so that they can't see you, and when they come in and see me they will be frightened to death."

By this time the knock had been repeated two or three times.

The boy was delighted at the idea, and quickly stepping to the door and unlocking it, stood behind it while he swung it open.

Meanwhile the detective stood in the shadow of one corner of the room awaiting the visitor or visitors' entrance.

The instant the door was opened Bull Anderson, his brother Butch and five or six of the gang strode into the room. Seeing no one, they stared about in astonishment.

At that point the detective shuffled out in front of them in the guise of Sheeny Ike.

"Who was it ye wants to see, mine tears?" whined he, rubbing his hands and grinning after the fashion of the original.

But, to the detective's surprise the men did not stampede in a wild panic from the apartment. On the contrary they frowned blackly and drew their pistols.

CHAPTER VII.

A MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

THE men stood glowering at the detective for some moments before they spoke.

Finally Bull Anderson, who was the leader, broke the silence.

"Youse is de mug we wants ter see!" he growled. "Yer t'ought yer'd skeer us de same ez yer did de mugs over at t' house, didn't yer? Wal, we ain't made o' dat kind o' stuff, see?"

Thad saw that he had been fairly caught.

For the life of him he could not imagine how the ruffians had discovered the location of his room, much less how they managed to penetrate his disguise. But that they had done both in some mysterious way went without saying. As the situation flashed through his mind, for a brief moment he allowed himself to think of Jimmie and half suspect him of being the traitor. But he did not give the matter a second thought. He had something else to think of just then.

A glance was sufficient to show him that the men were determined and had come there bent upon mischief.

Something must be done and that quickly. He realized that he was in no sense equal to the crowd before him, and some stratagem must be resorted to.

A happy thought came to favor his rescue.

When he was a boy, and before he had assumed the more serious role of detective, Thad had practiced ventriloquism, and one time was quite proficient in the art. At this critical moment it occurred to him to try its effect.

Turning his head to one side he gave a sharp whistle.

The next instant, what appeared to be at least a dozen men in an adjoining room answered:

"Ay, ay! We're with you," and this was followed by the distinct sound of the tramping of feet.

The ugly gang was startled, to say the least, and every eye was turned in the direction.

There was a door leading into the next room (which was locked on the opposite side, however,) and the ruffians evidently expected to see a small army of men burst through every instant.

This was the detective's opportunity.

Quicker than thought he had two revolvers leveled at them, and the next instant a half dozen shots followed each other in quick succession from his self-cocking pistols.

He did not intend to kill any of the gang—his object being to slightly wound one or more and to frighten all.

And his scheme was a success. The second shot broke Bull Anderson's arm and carried an ear away from one of the others. His second shot plowed an ugly furrow along Butch's left side and clipped off one of Dab Carroll's fingers.

By the time the third shot of the two weapons rung out the crowd was in a state of panic. The rapid and unexpected firing and its effective results, coupled with the shock they had already received from believing that a mob was about to attack them from the adjoining room, had completely unnerved them, and not a man had the presence of mind to use his weapon.

The next instant there was a wild stampede for the door, and inside of a minute there was not a man of them remaining.

Thad then looked about for Jimmie, but the little fellow was nowhere to be seen.

When Thad found the boy gone he felt satisfied that the little fellow had played the traitor.

What else could he think? How otherwise could the Anderson gang have known where he lodged, and how else could they have known that Sheeny Ike was in truth the detective in disguise?

Having arrived at this conclusion, it was but natural that he should have abandoned all hope of being directed to the hiding-place of Packey Lynch by the lad.

The detective was not satisfied, late as it was, to allow the night to pass without accomplishing, or trying to accomplish, something, and therefore hastily removing his Sheeny disguise he made himself up as a very raw countryman.

When this transformation was completed, he left his lodgings and pursued his way in the direction of Hell's Kitchen once more.

The night was extremely dark, and a cold, penetrating rain was steadily falling. Everything in the neighborhood of the den was quiet and the house itself was dark and still.

Thad hesitated before crossing the street to the house, and considered whether it would be worth while to do so, as the inmates appeared to have retired.

Just as he had about made up his mind to cross over and reconnoiter the premises, something occurred which caused him to hesitate still longer.

A close carriage drove up to the door of the den and two persons, the dim outline of whom the detective was barely able to make out, alighted and entered the den.

As the figures were disappearing through the front door the feeble street lamp on the corner flared up for a brief interval and revealed the retreating forms sufficiently for the detective to see that they were a man and a woman, but both were so closely veiled or muffled as to prevent recognition, even had they been any one whom he knew.

However, he was curious to know something about them and determined to find out if possible, so he crossed the street with a view to interviewing the hackman.

But, before the detective got half-way across the street the man came out and re-entered the carriage, when the latter was rapidly driven away.

This appeared to put an end to his investigation, but the detective continued his way mechanically across the highway.

He looked up at the building and listened, but neither light nor sound was to be seen or heard, and he was on the point of abandoning the attempt to investigate the mystery for the night, when a light footstep in the alleyway which pierced the building attracted his attention, and the next minute a diminutive form which he had no trouble in recognizing as that of Jimmie, darted out and started on a keen run across the street in the direction of Thad's lodgings.

So rapid had been his flight and so unexpect-

ed his appearance that the shadower had no time to stop him before the youngster was out of sight.

Surmising that the boy was making for his lodgings, the detective lost no time in following him.

As he half expected he found the boy at the street door trying to get in, but so far no one had answered the bell.

"Hello, Jimmie!" cried Thad. "What's up now?"

The boy started at the sound of his voice, and although he could not be seen in the darkness, his voice showed that he had been frightened by it.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Burr?" he said in tremulous tones.

"Yes, it is I. What brings you here, after deserting me awhile ago?"

"I didn't mean to desert you, sir," pleaded the boy. "But I knew that if Bull found me there he would kill me, so I took the opportunity offered when the men were looking for the others to come in from the other room to skeddaddle."

"Well, what brings you now?"

"Why, he's over there," answered Jimmie, excitedly.

"Whom?"

"Packey Lynch!"

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir, he just came."

"In the carriage?"

"No, sir; he came before the carriage arrived."

"Who was that in the carriage?"

"A man they call Arthur Munson and Lottie."

"Lottie?" cried the detective, in astonishment.

"Who is Lottie, my boy?"

"I don't know who she is, only that she used to come to the house once in a while to see Sbang Maher, and they called her Lottie. She is a fine lady, and pretty—not a bit like the women that live at the house, and they hate her."

The detective was silent a moment, and then asked:

"Do you think it likely that Packey will leave the house to-night, Jimmie?"

"Yes, sir. The king wouldn't let him stay all night, and you'll have a chance to catch him as he comes out. But if you will come with me you will have a chance to hear him talking with Lottie and maybe you will learn something that you would like to know."

Thad did not wait to make any further inquiries, but hastened away in the direction of Hell's Kitchen at once, with Jimmie at his heels.

When they reached the house the boy paused and whispered:

"Wait here a moment till I see if the coast is clear."

With that he darted away through the alleyway. A moment later he returned and whispered to the detective:

"All right, sir. Come this way. Easy!"

And the pair proceeded to grope their way through the darkness of the noisome alleyway.

When they reached the rear of the house Jimmie took the detective's hand and led him along through the littered court around a huge pile of rubbish and finally paused.

"Here is the stairway," he whispered. "Be careful; they're covered with ice."

And the little fellow began noiselessly to ascend the steps. The detective followed, and found the boy's assertion about the steps being covered with ice to be correct. Indeed, it was ticklish work climbing them without falling.

Finally they reached the landing, when the little guide opened a door and pulled at Thad's sleeve as an invitation to enter.

The detective obeyed and found himself in a small dark room, which appeared to be separated from the next apartment by a very frail partition, for he could not only hear everything that was going on in the next room, but the light from there streamed in at innumerable cracks.

Once in the room, Jimmie had no more to say, but subsided into silence and allowed the crook-shadower to pursue his own course.

The latter listened, and was rewarded by hearing a conversation passing between a man and woman in the next room. The speakers, although not conversing in a very loud tone of voice, evidently took no pains to avoid being heard by any one who might chance to be in an adjoining apartment.

To the detective's surprise, both parties used extremely good English, which was in strange contrast to the manner of speaking peculiar to the inmates of Hell's Kitchen.

After talking for some time upon matters which were incomprehensible to the listener, both became silent for some moments. Finally the woman resumed:

"I do not see why you should still continue to persecute me, Edward. You have certainly rendered my life unhappy enough. First taking my child away and murdering him—or worse, and then killing the only man I ever loved. Is not this enough, without wishing to couple me with the latter crime?"

The man indulged in a low fiendish chuckle.

"No, Lottie Mason, it is not enough!" he retorted. "It is but a thousandth part of what you compelled me to suffer when you threw me over for Jerold Maher, and then sent me to prison for seeking the vengeance which was but natural under the circumstances. But for you I might have been an honest, respected man, and probably a rich one; to-day, instead, I am the outcast—a hunted man."

"If you wished to drag me down thus, why did you conspire to get me divorced from him and then scheme to bring about the marriage between me and my present husband?"

"Because when you were the wife of Jerold Maher and after he had obtained a divorce from you, you would not at that time have felt the degradation that you will now. Therefore I planned and succeeded in raising you to the highest pinnacle of wealth and social eminence to which a reasonable woman could aspire, and now I shall have the pleasure of pulling you down and trampling you in the mire where you belong!"

Instead of breaking down as an ordinary woman would under the circumstances, she still retained her cool demeanor (perhaps she had already learned that any exhibition of weakness militated against her in her dealings with man), and asked:

"How are you going to make it appear that I hired you to assassinate Jerold?"

"Your letter agreeing to pay me five thousand dollars to do the job. Not knowing what job it meant, the jury, or your husband, or whoever sees it, will take my word for it that it was paid for the assassination of your first husband!"

This latest speech silenced her for a few moments, and when she did speak again, her voice had undergone a remarkable change. It showed unmistakable evidence of the weakness peculiar to her sex under peculiar circumstances, and trembled with emotion.

"Is there nothing that will induce you to have pity on me, Edward?" she asked.

"Nothing," was the cool rejoinder.

"Anything I possess—"

"Which is nothing—after I have spoken."

"But, why not share with me the riches which I now possess instead of snatching them away from me?"

This suggestion appeared to set the fellow to thinking, for he was silent a moment or two.

Finally he broke out suddenly:

"By Jove! I don't know but your suggestion is a good one! As a matter of fact I would gain nothing by dethroning you, while I would gain a good deal by getting hold of—say half or two-thirds of the old boy's rocks. I say, Lottie, how much has the old man got, anyhow, do you suppose?"

"He is worth a couple of millions, I believe," she faltered. "But of course you know that—"

"Good!" he interrupted, chuckling. "That's about my size. I have always desired to be a millionaire. Say, you pull the old man's leg for a cool million and turn it over to me, and I will never molest you again."

"A million dollars! Great Heaven! How am I to get possession of so great a sum?"

"That is none of my business. That is the price of my silence. It comes high, but it is worth a good deal to you."

"But it is as impossible for me to obtain such a sum as it is for you, Edward."

"It's a pretty bad case then, Lottie. How long would you want in which to raise the sum?"

"I cannot tell. You see—"

"A week?" he interposed impatiently.

"Ridiculous! Why, my husband could not raise half the amount in that time."

"Two weeks, then—a month—two months—three—no—yes, I will give you three months in which to raise the amount, and if it is not in my hands by that time, Mr.—somebody and all the rest of the world shall know that somebody's wife hired me to kill her first husband."

The proposition, absurd as it was, seemed to inspire the woman with new hope.

She probably knew perfectly well she could never raise the sum demanded, but three months was a long lapse of time in a case like this. It gave her time to breathe and to plan.

"Very well, Edward," she said, in a hopeful voice. "Give me three months, and do not molest me in the mean time, and I will try—"

"Try? I want no trials! I want successes! I want a promise to do, not a promise to try."

"Then I promise that at the end of three months you shall have the money."

"That's more like it. And now I will leave you."

This was followed by a silence, and Thad heard a door open and close, and, supposing that the fellow had left the place, the detective hurried down-stairs to capture him as he went out; but arrived just in time to see him enter a carriage and drive off.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLUMSY STRATAGEM.

THAD began almost to think that his luck had forsaken him when he saw the carriage containing the alleged murderer of Shang Maher rolling away and disappearing in the gloom of the early morning.

But a little reflection caused him to blame his own stupidity for having listened to the conversation between the murderer and the woman called Lottie instead of rushing in and arresting him while he had the opportunity.

However, Thad was not a man to grieve over spilled milk long, and determined to make up for his loss by good work in the future.

Remembering his appointment with Nevin for the next evening, Thad saw the necessity for gaining a little sleep, as he had had none of any account for several nights; so he returned at once to his lodgings, undressed and went to bed, never dreaming of the danger of being surprised again by the Anderson gang.

And for some reason the ruffians did not molest him. Perhaps they had had enough with their last experience with him.

The detective slept soundly until about noon, which was a long time for him, when he arose, dressed himself, made himself up as a dashing young swell and went out for a walk and something to eat.

When he returned to his room again he found Jimmie waiting in the hall near his room door.

The boy stared at him inquiringly when he saw the detective put his key into the lock, and then turned to address the little fellow.

"Well, my boy, what's up now?" he asked.

Jimmie smiled faintly as though he was not quite certain whether he was not being deceived, and at last murmured faintly:

"Are you the detective, sir?"

"Yes, my boy," replied Thad, laughing. "Don't you know me?"

"I know your voice, sir," answered the boy still staring incredulously. "But you change so much that I never know what you are going to look like the next time I see you. You don't look a bit like you ever did before. You look exactly like a young gent who used to come to the house with Packey Lynch."

"You don't tell me!"

And the detective became reflective. If this was the case he had accidentally hit upon a most fortunate disguise, for he could impersonate Lynch's friend when he went to call upon him, if the boy could still take the detective to his hiding-place.

While thus occupied with his reflections the boy suddenly interrupted him.

"It was too bad, sir, that you let Packey get away last night. You might have taken him then, but—"

"It is not too late yet, my boy," interrupted the detective, "provided you can take me to his hiding-place."

"But—but I can't, sir."

"Why?"

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Nobody knows. That's what I came over to tell you about. I heard him telling the king a little while ago that he was going where the bloodhounds of the law wouldn't smell him out, and stay there till Lottie raised the million dollars for him, and then he was going to live like a gentleman, and they wouldn't dare to arrest him."

"How long ago was that?"

"About an hour."

"He came back, then?"

"Came back?"

"Yes. You know he escaped and went off in the carriage last night or rather this morning, just as I reached the street."

The boy looked at him in surprise.

"No, sir, he didn't leave the house till an hour ago. When he left the room after talking to Lottie he went into another room and staid there till awhile ago."

"Who was it went in the carriage then?"

"It was Black Whiskers. He works for Packey, I think."

Now that he thought of it, Thad remembered that he did not see enough of the man who entered the carriage to know who he was, besides, never having seen Packey Lynch to know him, he could not have told whether it was he or not. Having seen a man hurry out of the house and jump into the carriage, he had taken it for granted that it was the man he was in pursuit of. But now he realized that it might just as well have been any other man, and the detective deplored his stupidity more than ever, and began to wonder whether his cunning as a great detective was not forsaking him.

However, he still entertained hopes that his appointment with Nevin might be the means of developing something, and did not despair.

A short time afterward Thad went out to dinner, and about half-past seven called upon Nevin at the Gilsey House.

A knock at the door brought that gentleman's drawing "Come in!" and Thad opened the door to find Nevin with his back to him, his feet cocked up higher than his head, smoking and reading a novel, as usual.

The detective, knowing that his friend would probably not recognize him, strode up to his side without speaking, and laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

As was peculiar to Nevin, he did not look up, but merely drawled, languidly:

"Hello, Bob! You're early. Won't go for an hour yet. Find a chair, and help yourself to a cigar."

Disguising his voice a little, Thad stepped in front of Nevin and, as he took a cigar from the box, said:

"Early, am I? Early for what, for instance?"

Nevin looked up slowly, and when his eyes fell upon the detective's face, drawled lazily:

"Oh, it's you, is it, Harry? By Jove, I thought it was Bob Harvey. I promised to go to the theater with him to-night. Bob gives a stag-party to see a new play to-night. Stupid affair, no doubt. Glad you came. Be an excuse for not going."

"But you have not forgotten your other engagement, have you, old fellow?" observed Thad.

Nevin stared at him in bewilderment.

"What other engagement?" he drawled.

"With me."

"Did I make an appointment with you for to-night, old man?"

"You certainly did."

"I don't recollect. Let me see."

And the young man fell into a fit of reflection.

"Oh, yes, I promised to play billiards with you, didn't I?" he at length murmured.

"Nothing of the kind."

"To see the Miss Sunderlands? No, that was for Sunday night, was it not?"

"Away off again, old fellow."

"What then?"

"You do not recall making an appointment with me on Madison avenue yesterday morning to take me to the house of Edward McDermot, I presume?"

The detective had employed his natural voice this time, and Nevin stared in perfect amazement.

"The deuce!" he finally ejaculated. "Who'd ever have thought it was you, you old rascal! However, I'm such a cursed fool that anybody can impose upon me. So I did make an appointment with you. I had forgotten all about it."

"And have, in consequence, hit upon no plan of operation, of course?"

"Never gave the matter a thought after leaving you, and have since made appointments with at least a dozen fellows."

"You're a nice fellow, I must say. So the thing is up for to-night, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it. Rather go with you than any of the other fellows, don't you know? But I will have to depend upon you for a plan. My cussed brain's too thick for plans."

"Very well. Who is the man Harry whom you mistook me for?"

"Harry Weaver."

"A friend of McDermot's?"

"I don't know about that. Though I do not think that he is."

"I am sorry for that. If we could be sure, there might be a chance of passing myself off as his friend, if we were sure that this man you call Harry was McDermot's friend. As it is, we shall have to hit upon some other method. I say, cannot you smuggle me into the house unobserved somehow and conceal me, so that I can watch without being discovered?"

Nevin was thoughtful for some moments.

At length an inspiration appeared to strike him.

"I have it!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I am as familiar in the house as I am in my own rooms here. You make yourself to resemble me—as you did once before, you remember. I'll go to the house, chat with the folks a little while, till they get ready to go to dinner (they dine at half-past eight.) They will invite me, but I will suddenly remember that I have an engagement and come out. As I pass the hall-boy, I'll tip him that I'm coming back in a few minutes. And then you can go in, walk straight back to the library and conceal yourself. How will that do?"

"Capitally!" exclaimed the detective. "I'll hurry off to my room and make up and wait for you on the sidewalk in front of McDermot's house."

"Good. I'll go right off, so as to be out of the way when any of those fellows call for me."

Thad hurried out of the hotel, and when he reached the street entered a cab and had himself driven with all speed to his apartments.

It did not take him long to make himself to resemble Nevin, as he was pretty much the same build and, taking the cab again, had himself driven as rapidly as possible to the Madison avenue mansion.

So rapid had been his movements altogether that he was compelled to wait a long time on the sidewalk for Nevin's appearance, so long, indeed, that he began to fear the young man had forgotten his appointment again and gone off with some one else.

Nevin finally came out of the house, however, and informed Thad that the family had descended to the dining-room and that the coast was consequently clear.

"And that will give me a chance to go with some of the other fellows," he remarked in conclusion. "But you must be sure to call on me at the hotel and tell me how you come out. If

this man is a rascal, as you imagine, I want to know it. I don't mind cutting him anyway, as he is getting awfully hard up of late. He just now told me that he did not know which way to turn, and asked me when I expected to have my legacy, as he wanted to borrow a few hundred for two or three months. Promised him, but if he is a rascal, that will be an excuse not to let him have it."

"All right," responded the detective. "You shall know the result of my adventure before morning. Good-by."

"Good-by. Success to you."

And the young fellow hurried away.

As soon as he had gone Thad ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

The footman bowed and smiled when he saw who it was, or rather who he thought it was, and said:

"The folks is at dinner, sir. Go right down or go into the library, if you wish, sir."

"I'll go into the library," answered the detective, simulating Nevin's voice as nearly as possible.

Thad then walked back and entered the library. There was fortunately no one there, and he had no trouble in selecting a hiding-place, which was behind a *portiere* which hung in front of another room off the library.

This, the detective concluded, would be the safest place, for, as the adjoining room was unlighted, he would have a chance to conceal himself further in the event of any one approaching the curtain behind which he was concealed.

Thad was compelled to remain in his place of concealment a long time before any one entered the room, but at length two persons came in, neither of whom, the detective soon discovered from the conversation that ensued, was McDermot.

It transpired from their conversation that one was a private secretary of McDermot and the other the butler. The secretary had a whining, nasal voice, and Thad conceived him to be a cringing, sycophantic creature with no more soul than a fish, while the butler had a heavy baritone voice, and appeared to be somewhat bombastic and domineering in his manner.

"So the old man has reinstated you, has he?" began the butler as soon as the men were seated.

"Ye—yes," faltered the secretary. "That is—"

"It's more than I ever expected," interposed the other in his heavy basso. "It isn't often that he makes up with anybody he has once got rid of. He would like to cut me, if he could, but he daren't, and he knows it."

The secretary's answer consisted of a sort of a cackle, which he doubtless intended for a laugh, but he said nothing.

"I s'pose you know why he wants to cut me, don't you, Filkins?" pursued the butler.

"N—no—that is—"

"Well, I'll tell you, but this is strictly between ourselves, and I want it to go no further."

The secretary cackled again, which the butler seemed to interpret as a promise of silence, and went on:

"I know too much about certain little transactions of his. I am not the man to squeal on an employer so long as he treats me right and gives me my bread and butter. But he is afraid of me—deadly afraid. One cause of this is, that he is liable to go to smash at any moment; and then he thinks that when I am no longer in his employ and under obligations to him, I am liable to peach, and away he would sail to the island."

Again he paused as though awaiting the secretary's response, but as the latter only cackled as before, the butler continued:

"If I could be the—the sucker—excuse me for saying it, Filkins—but that is the only word that expresses it. If I could be the sucker, I say, that you are, I would be a big dog with his nibs. But I ain't, and there is where we split. Now, take your own case, for example. Do you s'pose that if he had abused me as he did and then discharged me, that I would have come back and done the baby act to get a job of him? No, sir, I would dig in the ditch first!"

The secretary was still silent for awhile, but finally whined:

"It's altogether different with you, Boggs. You've always had a big salary, and have money put away. But I have had to work for next to nothing all my life, and have nothing from one week's end to the other but the pittance I earn. Besides, there is my mother and sister to look after."

"I pity you, Filkins," remarked the butler, in a rather contemptuous voice, "not for your poverty so much as your want of manhood to demand more for your work. Just think of it! I could no more do your work than I could fly, and yet my salary is just five times as great as yours. Why, the cook down-stairs, that can't write his name, gets five thousand a year."

Thus the two men talked on and on hour after hour, and the detective had not only become tired of waiting for the possible coming of McDermot, but he wondered what the secretary and butler were remaining in the library so long for.

Finally the butler arose, walked to the window which looked out upon the garden, and said:

"The old man takes his time about coming. I'm going out for fresh air."

With that he opened the door, when the secretary called to him and he hesitated.

"Won't—won't you have a glass of wine before you go out, Boggs?" he demanded.

As the butler walked toward the door Thad peeped out and saw the secretary pour out a glass of wine, and then taking a paper containing some sort of a powder from his pocket, empty its contents into the glass and stir it with a pencil.

Rapidly as he had worked, he had just completed his task when the butler opened the door to go out.

"I don't care if I do," replied the butler, in answer to the invitation, and walked back to the desk. He took the glass in his hand and, raising it between him and the light, observed:

"Some of the old man's best, I s'pose. Must be something extra. He's got so mean or so poor lately that he keeps nothing in the cellar worth drinking, and only buys his wine by the bottle and brings it up here. There's one advantage you have over me, Filkins. Here goes."

The butler raised the glass to his lips, but instead of drinking, again examined it between him and the light.

"Looks a little muddy, don't you think so, Filkins?" And he held it up for the secretary's inspection.

"Looks all right to me," rejoined the other. "See, I'm going to drink some." And pouring out a glass, tossed it off.

Thad wondered that the butler's suspicions were not aroused at this clumsy ruse, but they were not, apparently, for he merely inspected the wine again. And then tossing it out upon the floor, refilled the glass from the bottle, raised it between him and the light with the observation:

"Ah, that looks better!" and tossed it off.

He then walked to the window again, looked out, and remarked:

"It's a beautiful night! I never saw the moon shine brighter!"

He then opened the door and went out.

The secretary ground his teeth and muttered an oath.

At that moment, to Thad's surprise, another man stole out from behind a *portiere* on the opposite side of the room, where he had been concealed. It was the man Thad had seen on the corner!

CHAPTER IX.

A FIENDISH PLOT.

WHEN McDermot (for he it was), emerged from his hiding-place, Thad saw that he was as pale and scared-looking as the secretary himself.

Approaching the latter and clutching his arm with a trembling hand, he stared wildly about and gasped:

"Where is he?"

Filkins, who was evidently too much frightened to speak, pointed toward the door through which the butler had gone.

McDermot gazed in the direction for a few seconds in silence, his whole frame quaking as with an ague, and then, without removing his eyes from the door, asked in a hoarse whisper:

"Did he drink the wine?"

The secretary hesitated. He evidently did not dare to tell the truth, and yet was at a loss for the instant to explain the fact that the butler was still alive.

So he adopted what seemed to be the simplest way out of the dilemma—lying.

"Yes," he gasped.

"And—and—he's still alive?" faltered McDermot.

Badly frightened as the secretary was, he could not fail to see that he had adopted a safe course, and evidently concluded to keep it up.

"Yes," he replied. "At least he was when he went out."

Without appearing to notice the absurdity of this remark, McDermot tiptoed nervously to the window overlooking the garden and looked out.

His face grew more ashen as he gazed, and the quaking of his body increased to such a degree that he appeared scarcely able to stand.

"Yes, yes!" he muttered hoarsely. "There he is! Walking back and forth as calmly as though he had never tasted the poison! My God! The fellow must be made of iron! But we must try something else. Filkins!" he called, still looking out the window as though the sight fascinated him.

The frightened secretary slunk, cringing and trembling, to his side and looked beseechingly up into his face as a whipped cur might have done.

McDermot clutched his arm convulsively, but did not remove his eyes from the object of their infatuation outside.

"Filkins!" he gasped, "can you use a pistol? No, no, no, a pistol won't do. It will make too much noise. But we must kill him! Ah! I have it! A knife! Can you use a knife?"

The wretch shuddered at the suggestion. "Uh!" he exclaimed, and made no other response.

"Yes, yes!" continued McDermot, disregarding the secretary's conduct. "He must be killed! Now! Now! You must use a knife, Filkins! You must use a knife! That will make no noise. Slip out there and conceal yourself in the shrubbery when he goes the other way—close to the path—and as he passes you on his return, spring upon him and stab him to the heart! It will be easy—it will be easy!"

Again Filkins shuddered and made no reply, and as he looked up into the other's face his own wore an expression of the most abject terror that Thad had ever beheld in a human visage.

It was absolutely pitiful.

Still disregarding the poor wretch's plight, McDermot withdrew from the window, stole across the room and disappeared behind the *portiere* where he had been concealed before.

A moment later he returned in the same stealthy manner with a long glittering dagger in his hand.

"Here," he said in the same hoarse whisper that had characterized his speech throughout, "here is the knife. See! It is keen, keen as a razor. The weight of your hand will force it to the hilt! Take it!" And he tendered it to the trembling secretary.

Filkins grasped the knife with his trembling hand as timidly as though it had been a snake.

And the instant the cold metal came in contact with his hand he uttered the horrified gasp, "Uh!" and let the dagger drop to the floor.

"Fool! Coward!" exclaimed McDermot, stooping to pick up the knife. "What are you afraid of? Take the knife and do as I tell you!"

The miserable wretch seemed unable to even raise his hands from his sides, where they hung limp and nerveless, while his whole form quaked like one with palsy.

"Take it, coward! Fool!" still urged McDermot. "Take it, I say!"

The wretch gasped and strangled as though unable to speak.

For a full minute he could only utter a sort of gurgle similar to that of a dying man.

But after McDermot had repeated his command several times, he finally succeeded in faltering:

"I can't, I can't!"

"You can, and you shall!" commanded McDermot, whose excitement and anger had in a measure restored his courage. "Remember your position and the thousand dollars!"

"Yes, yes, I know," whined the wretch. "But I cannot do it. I have not the courage. The sight, the touch of the knife terrifies me. I cannot kill him, sir! Please, please don't ask me to do it!"

"Idiot!" thundered the other. "Do you not want to return to your position? Do you not want the thousand dollars? Just think of it! A thousand dollars in cash! Do you want that, man, or would you rather starve, and see your mother and sister starve?"

"No, no, I do not want to starve. I would like to return to my position and have the money. But—"

And for an instant the wretch's greed of gold seemed to instill a shadow of courage into him, and he put out his hand for the knife.

But the instant he touched it, a shiver ran through him as though his hand had come in contact with a piece of ice, and it dropped limp and lifeless at his side again.

"I cannot, I cannot," he whined.

At this McDermot lost his patience, clutched him by the throat and shook him till his teeth chattered.

"Curse your imbecility!" he hissed. "What are you made of? Have you the blood of a man in your veins, or the blood of a sheep? Blame you! if you do not take this knife and do as I tell you, I'll plunge it into your own cowardly heart!"

And he raised the blade above the wretch as though he intended to put his threat into execution.

The miserable man fell quaking to his knees and began to howl piteously.

"Mercy! Mercy!" he whined, clutching imploringly at McDermot's knees. "Don't kill me, sir! For God's sake, don't kill me!"

McDermot looked down upon him with the most utter contempt, and spurned him with his feet as he would have done a dog.

"Get out, you contemptible imbecile!" cried McDermot. "I'd scorn to strike you. When I kill a man I want him to have at least blood enough in him to stain the blade which I plunge into him. You have not. Get out of my sight!"

McDermot then started toward the back door as though he intended to execute the commission himself.

The secretary staggered to his feet, grasped the edge of the desk for support and gazed timidly after him.

When McDermot reached the door and put his hand on the knob, he turned and looked back. Seeing the secretary gazing appealingly at him, he contemplated the fellow for a moment or two.

At length he retraced his steps to the side of

the secretary, and asked, in the grating kind of whisper he had used at the beginning of the interview, making it appear that his own courage was forsaking him again:

"Well, do you think you can do it now, sir?"

After a desperate struggle the fellow succeeded in replying:

"I'll try, sir."

And for a brief spell a glimmer of determination appeared to struggle into his face.

McDermot strode quickly up to him and without another word, thrust the knife into his hand again.

This time the secretary managed to hold it, but his frame became convulsed with the same chill which had previously agitated it.

Determined not to let him falter this time, however, McDermot at once began pushing him toward the door.

The fellow went without resistance till the door was reached and McDermot had again put his hand upon the knob, when the secretary turned his ashen face toward him and implored:

"Oh, sir, how can I do it? It will be murder! Remember, sir! Murder!"

With a view to stimulating the fellow's waning courage, McDermot laughed derisively.

"That is nothing," he said lightly. "It won't be much of a murder to kill a butler. Besides, remember he sneered at you. Called you a sucker!"

A cloud passed over the secretary's face, accompanied by something very nearly resembling an expression of determination; but both soon passed and gave place to an expression of terror, and again he looked appealingly into McDermot's face.

But he saw no consolation or sympathy there. Moreover, McDermot appeared in no humor for further dallying, and, without another word, jerked open the door and attempted to thrust the secretary out by main force.

Filkins clung despairingly to one of the jambs and, with his colorless face turned beseechingly up to that of the other, whined:

"Mercy, mercy! For God's sake, don't compel me to do it!"

McDermot glared savagely at him for an instant, and then left him, strode across the room to the desk, opened a drawer, took out a pistol and walking back to the door, put the muzzle of the weapon to the secretary's head.

"Now you get out there and do what I tell you, or I'll blow your head off in about a second!" he growled.

"But—but—"

"I will have no more nonsense about it," interposed McDermot, savagely. "Go!"

With that he was about to push him out the door, but glancing outside at that moment, he hesitated.

"Wait," he murmured, in an undertone. "He is coming this way. Wait till he starts back."

And then a strange thing happened.

So far from offering any further resistance, the fellow suddenly clutched the knife with a firm grasp, and, while Thad could not see his face from where he was concealed, the pose of the fellow's body, a certain anxious leaning forward and a nervous twitching of the whole frame told as plainly as words that he had suddenly undergone a radical change—that he was now anxious to commit the act.

If the detective had had any doubt in the matter, the secretary's actions a moment later were sufficient to convince him of the unaccountable freak.

Turning his face toward McDermot, he gave vent to a low, fiendish chuckle.

His eyes were wild and unnatural, and the face wore that awful expression of exultation of the maniac!

There could be no doubt of it.

The fellow was stark mad!

The mental strain, the awful terror which he had endured for the past several minutes had completely unsettled his reason, and the very act which had caused him such terror a moment ago, had suddenly become an infatuation, as a timid person approaching the brink of a precipice is sometimes seized with an almost irresistible desire to leap over.

A moment later McDermot gave the secretary a gentle push, accompanied with the command:

"Now!"

Filkins wanted no further urging now, and sprang out like a cat after a mouse.

McDermot followed him and closed the door behind him.

It was not till then that the detective found himself released from the spell that seemed to root him to the spot, and he lost no time in gaining the door, when lo! he found it locked!

It was in vain that he struggled to tear it open, it would not yield to his most powerful efforts.

He rushed to the window and attempted to raise it, but it, too, was fastened.

He thought of smashing out one of the panes, but considered in time that this would warn the rascals of his presence, and allow them to escape.

And then the scene outside suddenly put him under the spell again, so that for several min-

utes he could do nothing but stand and gaze out the window.

It was a beautiful night. The moon had never shone more resplendently, turning the frost upon the trees and shrubbery and frozen fountain into a million glistening diamonds.

Thad looked in vain for the two rascals. They were nowhere to be seen, but along the frosty path at some distance came the butler, sauntering slowly and carelessly along, utterly indifferent to or unconscious of the fate in store for him.

As he neared the window the detective caught the notes of a sad, plaintive song he was singing.

Thad rapped frantically upon the window to attract his attention, but just then a gale of wind howled about the corners of the house, and the butler did not hear him, and when he got to the end of the path, he turned and sauntered back toward the other end again.

Once he paused and looked up at the starry sky, and as he did so, Thad saw a white face emerge from a clump of shrubbery close behind him, but it as quickly disappeared, and the butler walked on unscathed to the other end of the path. Then he started back toward the house once more.

As he neared the spot where the would-be assassins were concealed, the detective's heart beat wildly, for he expected to see one of them spring upon the poor, unconscious fellow and stab him to the heart.

Still he came on, and finally arrived opposite the clump of shrubbery again.

And then all of a sudden Thad saw him leap into the air, and at the same instant a blood-curdling shriek broke upon the stillness of the night!

An instant later he saw the crouching form of McDermot leap out of the shrubbery, dart away and disappear in the shadow.

For a moment or two Thad's excitement was so intense that he did not see what passed, and before he realized what was going on, the servants were rushing in from all directions, and asking a thousand excited questions about who had screamed, and just then somebody unlocked the back door and opened it.

The rush of cold air brought the detective to a realization of his situation, and he looked to see who had entered.

To his unutterable astonishment, it was the butler, and he held a bloody knife in his hand.

The poor fellow was pale and nervous, but he finally made out to say, in response to Thad's question:

"He is out there. The old man has done for him. I picked the knife out. I do not know why he did it—didn't know that either of them was out there."

Thad could have told him, however, why McDermot had stabbed the secretary. It was undoubtedly because the poor wretch failed at the last minute and McDermot losing all patience with him, had snatched the knife away from him and used it upon himself.

The detective lost no time in getting outside now, accompanied by a dozen servants whom he had summoned, and made a thorough search of the grounds, while some of the others removed the body of the murdered secretary into the house.

But when every nook and corner of the garden had been searched no trace of McDermot was to be found.

Thad was heart-sick and disgusted with himself. Never, in all his career as a detective, had he made so many blunders as he had made in the last twenty-four hours.

He was retracing his steps slowly toward the house, when, on passing a clump of shrubbery, he heard a slight rustle, and the next instant a powerful pair of hands clutched his neck from behind!

CHAPTER X.

THE BUTLER'S STORY.

POWERFUL a man as Thad was, he found all he wanted to do to shake off his antagonist.

The latter was also a very powerful man, besides having the advantage of the detective.

Thad struggled manfully, though, and after a severe tussle of a few minutes' duration, succeeded in wrenching himself free.

But when he turned upon his assailant, he found him ready to attack him in another way.

The fellow was crouching like a tiger ready for a spring, and armed with a long knife.

The detective saw the gleam of the blade in time, although he could not see the man's face. The knife had come up at a point where a ray of light struck it.

Taking it for granted that his assailant was McDermot, the detective was at a loss to know how he came by the knife, as he had left the only one Thad had seen in his possession sticking in Filkins's breast.

All this flashed through the detective's mind in an instant, and he realized that he was no match for his assailant unless he resorted to extreme measures, and he drew his pistol. But he had hardly got the weapon out of his pocket, when the other had his own revolver leveled at him.

Honors appeared to be easy, and Thad realized that he was no better off than before.

He thought rapidly, and tried to invent some stratagem by which to get the advantage of his adversary.

He heard the servants still moving about in the garden and knew that they were near him, although he dared not look around, and he wondered why they neither attacked him nor came to their master's assistance.

And so he determined to call them to his own.

"Come, good people!" he called. "I am a detective, and command you in the name of the law to help me to take this man, who is a murderer!"

Instantly the tramping which he had heard ceased and it became as quiet as the grave about him.

The detective did not know what to make of it. But soon concluded that the servants were afraid to take sides against their master.

Almost at the instant his assailant broke out in a peal of derisive laughter.

"Aren't equal to it yourself, eh?" he sneered.

Thad recognized the voice as that of the man he had heard in conversation with the woman called Lottie, and at the same time realized that it was not that of McDermot.

He was just wondering at the coincidence—wondering who the fellow was, how he had got there, and what had become of McDermot, when he heard a footstep so light as to be almost inaudible, gliding around behind his assailant.

The latter evidently did not hear it, for he evinced no concern, but the next instant Thad saw the dim shadow of a figure behind the man in front of him, and a second later saw that the fellow was struggling in the grasp of some one who had clutched him from behind as the fellow had caught the detective a moment before.

The grip of Thad's unknown ally must have been very powerful, for the fellow soon began to breathe heavily, and a few seconds later threw up his hands in a convulsive manner as though on the point of being strangled into insensibility.

Thad then hastened to his ally's assistance and caught his assailant's wrists and soon wrenched the weapons—the knife in one hand and the pistol in the other—away from him.

The fellow's struggles had now become extremely feeble, and Thad had no difficulty in slipping the handcuffs upon his wrists.

"Slacken on his windpipe, as we have him safe," ordered the detective, and the unseen person released Thad's assailant.

"Take the other arm," said Thad, grasping one of the prisoner's arms himself.

The mysterious person, who had never uttered a word all this time, obeyed, and the prisoner was led into the house.

Then it was that the detective discovered that his prisoner was the same man whom he had seen making his escape from Sal Womelsdorf's room, and that his ally was none other than the butler.

Believing that he had made an important capture, Thad, with the butler's assistance, conducted the prisoner out to the corner, where he encountered the patrolman on that beat, and had the latter send in a call for a patrol-wagon.

While they were waiting for the wagon to come quite a crowd gathered about them, and to Thad's surprise and discomfort, he soon began to recognize faces that he had seen about Hell's Kitchen.

This looked suspicious, and Thad whispered his apprehensions to the patrolman, but the latter thought there was no cause for alarm.

Thad insisted that there was, and the events of the next few minutes proved the wisdom of his theory.

The crowd had grown to several hundred strong, the majority of whom were well-dressed, respectable people, such as are most commonly seen in that locality; who had been passing and stopped out of curiosity to see what was going on; but there was also a considerable sprinkling of the rough element. The latter, as usual, pushed and surged to such an extent that one would have supposed they composed three-fourths of the crowd.

They had already pressed forward till they were not only on the inside of the circle, but had begun to jostle Thad and the patrolman, but so far had made no serious demonstration.

Finally the clanging of a gong and the rumble of rapidly-rolling wheels announced the approach of the patrol wagon.

This caused the crowd to divide in half and surge back toward the sidewalk on either side of the street, and just then there was a shout from what appeared to be a new-comer, and it was taken up by the rough element.

Again Thad whispered to the policeman to be on his guard, for he knew too well the significance of this yell. It meant that the mob was in prime humor for a riot, but the officer still scouted the idea.

The next instant the new-comer who had given the signal pushed his way through the jam and stood close to Thad and his prisoner.

Thad glanced casually at him, when to his

astonishment and discomfiture, he saw that it was Bull Anderson! Close behind the ruffian were at least a dozen more of his gang.

At the same moment the wagon dashed up, but was stopped on the outskirts of the crowd by at least twenty more of the gang, which distracted the attention of the officers from what was going on inside the circle.

This was the signal for Anderson and his followers to begin operations.

With a wild yell they surged against the detective and policeman, nearly knocking them off their feet, and causing them to draw their arms in self-defense. This was what the ruffians wanted. The moment the pistols were in sight, Anderson gave the signal to charge, and quicker than lightning every ruffian in the crowd drew some kind of a weapon, some pistols, some knives and others clubs, and the riot commenced in real earnest.

Thad and the policeman fought heroically, but it was of no avail against such overwhelming numbers, and in less than a minute from the time the first signal was given, the patrolman had been knocked senseless, Thad disarmed and hustled several yards away from his prisoner, covered with bruises, and the prisoner smuggled off somewhere in the shadow, out of sight of the police.

This was all accomplished in so short a time that the policemen who had come with the patrol-wagon had not time to realize what was on foot before it was all over, and the scamps had dispersed and disappeared in the darkness.

Thad's injuries were not very severe, at least for him, who was used to such things, and as his prisoner had been rescued, there appeared nothing for him to do but take himself off out of the crowd.

He returned to the house where the murder had been committed, however, for the purpose of making one more effort to find McDermot, and was met on the stoop by the butler, who was delighted to see him.

"I was waiting here on purpose," the latter began, "hoping that you might come back. I am sorry your prisoner was rescued by the mob; but perhaps you will have a chance of catching him again."

Thad thanked him for his solicitude, but was more deeply interested to know what had become of McDermot just then than in the prisoner who had escaped.

"Yes," he replied, "the fellow is pretty well known; besides, as I will be able to identify him now, there is little doubt that I shall be able to run him down. But what I would like to know at present is what became of McDermot. Has he been seen since the murder?"

"No, sir, and he probably will not be for some time. But he will turn up sooner or later. He always does."

This last remark caused the detective to wonder a little.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Has he ever been guilty of anything of this kind before?"

"I don't know that he ever was guilty of murder exactly, sir; but he has been mixed up in about every thing else."

"What, for instance?"

The butler glanced about to make sure that no one was within ear-shot, and was about to speak, but appeared to suddenly change his mind, for he turned toward the door with the remark:

"It's pretty cold out here; besides somebody might be listening. Suppose we go into the library, sir?"

Thad looked at his watch and saw that it was after midnight, and reflecting that he could do little if anything more that night, signified his acceptance of the invitation, and the two men proceeded into the library.

"First, I want to tell you that you would never have heard the story I am about to relate had it not been for the occurrence to-night. The old man has long desired to get rid of me on account of my knowledge of some of his misdeeds, and after this affair he will certainly discharge me, and I shall no longer take pains to guard his secrets."

"Were you aware," interposed the detective, "that it was McDermot's intention to put you out of the way to-night?"

"What," gasped the butler, turning pale.

"That is how he came to kill the secretary," pursued Thad. "He attempted to make the secretary kill you in consideration of being restored to his position and a thousand dollars in cash. But the fellow was such a consummate coward that he durst not do it, and McDermot, in a fit of rage, probably, snatched the knife which was intended to be used upon you, from the craven wretch, and plunged it into him."

"You don't tell me!" gasped the butler. "This is terrible! My God!"

The butler fell into a brown study for some minutes, and finally mused in an abstracted way:

"This was what the old man wanted of me, then. I never dreamed of such a thing. Bad as I know him to be, I did not imagine him capable of such a thing as that."

And he again became silent, and his silence lasted so long that the detective feared he had

forgotten the story he had promised to tell, and finally prompted him.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "I had almost forgotten. This other thing worried me so. Well, let me see—it was about six years ago—McDermot was just married to his present wife (he had been married before, and his first wife died very suddenly and mysteriously, some thought), and the old man was in clover, for his present wife brought him a fortune, which he has about run through now, however. For several years before he had been running after an actress named Miss Gay, and tried hard to marry her, but she would have nothing to do with him. Some said she was already married, but I do not know how that was."

"I say she would have nothing to do with McDermot. I am wrong in one sense. She and he were good friends as such things go, and I am satisfied from conversations I have heard between them that she was a pure woman."

"For some time before and a long time after his second marriage nothing was heard of the actress. I guess nobody knew exactly what had become of her. But one night some time after his marriage—it was a stormy, terrible night, I remember—a woman in rags came to the door and asked for the old man."

"When he saw her he was in a terrible state."

"Angry?"

"Not as much angry as nervous and all broke up."

"He knew her, then?"

"Yes, sir. It was the actress, Miss Gay. As luck would have it, his wife was away at the time—gone to spend a few days with her parents up on the Hudson—and finally, after a good deal of confidential talk out on the stoop, he brought her in here, and I was surprised to see that she had a child with her, a little boy about six years old."

"Well, they had a long conversation, and I listened to it from behind that curtain there (I was curious in those days), and I learned that the woman and her child had been put out of the house because she couldn't pay the rent, that her husband, who was a drunken fellow, had deserted her, and that for a long time she had been sick in the hospital. The old man seemed to sympathize with her, but assured her that he was poor himself and could do nothing for her."

"She said that she did not want him to do anything for her; that if he would only take her boy and bring him up, she could take care of herself. And then she told him that the boy had a fortune coming to him, several thousand of which could be obtained if anybody had money to push the case, and the balance when he was of age."

"At the mention of the money, the old man's heart melted at once. He not only agreed to take her boy and bring him up, but he would get the money for her."

"She was so grateful to him that she got down on her knees to thank him, and told him that, aside from the amount necessary to keep her boy McDermot should keep all the money, at which he assured her that he would not think of touching a penny, as it was all hers and she needed it worse than he did."

"Then he had her sign papers and turn over to him some more papers which she did not sign, and he gave her a little money, after which she left."

"The child was about the house for a few days, and it seemed to be a source of a good deal of worry to the old man. Finally, one night I was just going over the house for the last time to see that everything was to rights, and supposed that everybody was abed, except the old man, who, the missus had told me, would be detained down-town till very late. As I came through that side room and was about to push the curtain aside to come in here, I was surprised to hear somebody talking in here."

"Pausing to listen, I discovered that it was the old man and another person who seemed to be a ruffian of some description. They had not conversed five minutes when McDermot said: 'Well, do as you please about it. It makes little difference to me how it is done, so it is got out of my way.' Somehow I thought of the child at once, and believed that they intended to kill it, or at least that the ruffian did, and I determined to save it if I could. Without waiting to hear any more of the conversation, I got my hat and ran with all my might to the police-station and told the sergeant in charge what my suspicions were."

"Well, you know how the police are about such things. They take their time. The sergeant promised to 'see about it,' and I hurried with all speed back to the house. But just as I got in sight I saw a close carriage drive away, and knew that it was too late."

"The old man must have suspected me of knowing more about the matter than I should, for he met me in the hall and accosted me about it. I admitted having overheard the conversation, and he looked troubled; but finally laughed and said: 'And I s'pose you'll be reporting on me, won't you?' And then before I had time to reply, he went on: 'A great deal of good it will do you, old fellow, for every servant in the

house will swear that there never was a child here, and you'll get about ten years in the Penitentiary or a life in the insane asylum for your pains,' and walked away from me. So, after thinking the matter over, I concluded that as it was none of my business anyway, I'd better keep my fingers out of the fire. But now that—"

But at that moment the library door opened, and McDermot, accompanied by two policemen, entered the room. One of the officers held a warrant for the arrest of Anthony Boggs for the murder of Simpson S. Filkins, the late secretary!

CHAPTER XI.

LOOKS LIKE A "HOODOO."

THE appearance of McDermot and the officers was so sudden and unexpected, and the action of the latter so peremptory, that before Thad or the butler had time to realize what was on foot it was all over and the latter was in irons.

And in the mean time McDermot had been so intent upon the business of arresting the butler that he did not notice the presence of the detective, but when the poor fellow had been handcuffed, Thad was brought to a sudden realization of the wrong that was being done and stepped forward to protest and assert the man's innocence.

"This man is no more guilty of the murder than I am," protested the detective; "and if you want to find the real criminal you need not go far."

"What do you mean?" demanded the officer.

"I mean that you will find him in this very room," responded the detective stoutly, "and his name is Edward McDermot."

The policeman smiled incredulously.

"How do you happen to know so much about it, young man?" he sneered. "Did you see it?"

"I saw enough to convince me that he is the murderer and that this man whom you have arrested is innocent."

"In that case we shall have to take you along and detain you as a witness," growled the officer with a still broader grin. "Who are you, anyway?"

All this time, although Thad was not aware of it, McDermot had had his eyes riveted on him, and before he could answer the policeman's question, McDermot stepped forward and grasped his hand with the exclamation:

"Hello, Gus! When did you come back?"

"Just in time to see you knife the secretary out there in the garden," rejoined Thad.

McDermot laughed.

"That is a pretty story to tell on an old friend, Gus," he laughed. "If it were not for the fact that I can prove, first by all the servants that you left the house at half-past eight promising to be back in an hour, and never came back till an hour ago, and second that I was in bed when the murder was committed and knew nothing about it until my valet came up and notified me, I should accuse you of doing me a great wrong, inasmuch as there would be a great chance of getting your old friend into trouble."

"You know this man, then, do you, Mr. McDermot?" said the policeman.

"Know him? Well, I should rather say I do! His name is Augustus Nevin, and I have known him some ten years, isn't it, Gus?"

Now was Thad's opportunity.

Snatching off his wig, mustache and imperial, he cried:

"How long did you say you have known me, Mr. McDermot?"

Both he and the two policemen stared at the detective in dumb amazement.

For a long time neither of them could find his tongue.

The policeman who had served the warrant, and who had met Thad before, was the first to speak.

"What, Detective Burr?" he gasped.

"That is the name I generally go by, when I am not going under some other name," rejoined the detective.

"And—and you saw this murder?" stammered the policeman.

"Not exactly; but I saw enough to know that this man you have arrested is innocent, and to believe that this man," pointing at McDermot, "is guilty."

The officer looked inquiringly at McDermot as if for an explanation.

The latter smiled sarcastically.

"If you choose to take the detective's word for it," he observed coolly, "you may arrest me, officer—provided you have a warrant," he added, doubtfully.

"A warrant will not be necessary, if Mr. Burr saw enough of the affair to satisfy him that you are the guilty man," interposed the policeman timidly.

"I command you to arrest him, and will take the responsibility," said Thad sternly, "and to release the butler."

Without further parley, the officer removed the irons from Boggs's wrists and was about to place them on those of McDermot, when the latter asked in a humble voice:

"Before you handcuff me, officer, won't you please let me go up and tell my wife what has happened and bid her good by?"

The officer glanced at Thad, and the latter frowned warningly.

"I suppose there will be no objection, provided I go with him?" faltered the policeman.

"But my wife will go into hysterics if she sees the uniform," protested McDermot.

"Very well, then," rejoined Thad, "I will go."

"Thank you, sir," cried McDermot in the most polite manner possible. "But won't you please replace your disguise, so that she will mistake you for my friend Nevin?"

Thad saw no reason for refusing this reasonable request, especially as it had been made in so gentlemanly a manner.

"Certainly," he responded.

And, stepping in front of a mirror, soon replaced the wig and beard, rendering himself once more the very image of Nevin.

"Now I am ready," he said. "Lead on, Officers," he went on, addressing the policemen, "you had better remain here until we return."

The latter bowed, and without more ceremony McDermot led the way out of the room.

The moment he was out of sight of the policemen, McDermot dropped his assumed humility, and became arrogant and almost defiant.

He evidently imagined he had a weaker character to deal with than he really had.

He said nothing, however, till he reached the door of his wife's room, when he turned veremptorily toward the detective, and in the most dictatorial manner imaginable, commanded:

"Now, you wait out here till I come out."

That was the very thing Thad would have proposed had the fellow said nothing; but now that he had commanded it in the manner he had, the detective was determined to do nothing of the kind.

"On the contrary, I will go in with you," he asserted, sternly.

"Into my wife's room, sir?"

"Suit yourself," replied Thad coolly. "Either I will accompany you every step you take, or you will return with me now without seeing your wife!"

"This is simply an outrage!" roared McDermot.

"Hurry up and decide what you want to do. I do not propose to wait here all night!" commanded the detective.

"Well, sir, I propose to go in alone!" cried McDermot.

"In that case you will not go in at all. Come. You shall accompany me down-stairs at once."

Instead of replying, McDermot made a sudden spring toward the door and, before the detective could check him, had thrust it open and dodged into the room, closing the door behind him.

Thad was after him instantly, but when he tried the door he found it locked.

That did not discourage him, however.

Regardless of the possible consequences of bursting into a room containing an enemy, the detective drew back and came against the door with all his force. But to his disappointment, it resisted him.

Still not despairing, he drew off and came against it again.

This time the structure cracked and seemed on the point of yielding.

Then he paused to listen, and was surprised to find it as still as death inside.

This was a bad omen, as he well knew, for it probably meant that the fellow was laying for him inside, ready to pounce upon him with a knife or shoot him as soon as he entered.

But instead of being deterred on this account, and being encouraged by the indication that the door was about to give way, he made another desperate lunge against it.

This time the door flew from its hinges and fell crashing to the floor.

The room was in total darkness, and not a sound of any kind was to be heard.

This was additional cause for apprehension.

McDermot was probably crouching in the darkness awaiting his entrance.

But the detective did not enter at once.

He put his head inside, however, and listened intently for some minutes. He knew that if any one was in the room he could hear him breathe, so still was it; but even this could not be heard, and he made bold to flash his lantern inside.

As the mellow glow from the bull's-eye moved gradually about the apartment, he saw that it was not only deserted, but that it was not a bedroom as he had expected, and therefore could not be the fugitive's wife's room at all.

But where had he gone?

Thad entered the room and looked about more thoroughly.

The room was small, and, with the exception of a desk, a couple of chairs, a small case of books and some bric-a-brac, was bare of furniture.

There appeared to be no way of escape. He examined the bookcase, thinking it might be a sham, and in reality only a false door, but to his disappointment, it was genuine.

He next tried the walls and the floor for secret panels and traps, but was disappointed in finding none.

Thad was in despair. He could make nothing

ing out of it. It was perfectly inexplicable how McDermot had got out of the room, although that he had done so there could not be a shadow of a doubt, for there was absolutely no place there for a man to secrete himself.

He turned to leave the room, intending to consult the butler, who would doubtless know the secret of the fellow's disappearance. But he had taken but a few steps in the direction of the door, when an approaching footstep caused him to pause and flash his light toward the door.

The next instant the butler stepped in and stood before him.

The butler glanced at the demolished door, then around the room, and finally at the detective.

"Is he gone?" he whispered.

"Yes," replied Thad in a disappointed tone.

"And what is worse, I cannot make out where he has gone."

Boggs shrugged his shoulders.

"I should have warned you not to let him get into this room," he said, apologetically. "He has it fixed up on purpose."

"But how? I see no place for any one to escape, unless he could turn himself into a mouse."

The butler laughed softly.

"There is where the ingenuity of it comes in," he observed. "You might search the room for a week—probably—and never discover it; but it is here all the same."

"But where?" demanded the detective impatiently. "If you know let me into the secret at once. It is important that he should be followed without delay."

Again the butler shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid it will do no good to follow him now," he remarked. "In fact, you can't follow him, for there is the way he went out, sir."

And Boggs pointed at the ceiling.

Thad threw the glare of his light aloft, and was surprised to see what appeared to be a square panel, about four feet across against the ceiling.

"What is that?" he asked, curiously.

"It is an elevator," replied the butler.

"An elevator?"

"Yes, sir."

"How does it work?"

"By touching a secret spring that platform descends to the floor and immediately returns to the ceiling again without stopping. When the old man wants to escape from any one, he touches this spring and, when the elevator comes down he jumps on and is carried up to where you now see it and he has only to step off into the room above."

"Do you not know the location of this secret spring?"

"Yes. But that is of no use to us. The old man has a peculiarly-shaped key which he first puts into this little hole you see here," continued the butler, pointing to a small interstice in the wall, "when the spring comes out so that he can press it. Without the key we can do nothing."

"Can we not get into the room above?"

"Oh, yes. But that would do us no good."

"Why?"

"Because there is another elevator in it which goes down to the ground floor, and has a door opening into the back yard."

"Why did not you tell me this before I came up?" demanded the detective rather severely.

"Because I was too much excited over my own arrest, sir, for one thing; and because I supposed that you were coming up to madam's room, for another, although I might have known that he would come here and try to make his escape. I am very sorry, sir."

Thad was silent for some moments. At length he resumed:

"Well, there is no use of worrying over it now. It was not your fault. I should not have granted his request to come up. He will never have such a chance again, if I get my eyes upon him."

With that he walked down-stairs, closely followed by the butler.

When he reached the hall below, Thad made at once for the front door, and when he got out on the sidewalk he saw that the butler was still at his heels.

The detective looked at him in surprise.

"Where are you going, my good fellow?" he asked.

"Home," replied the other.

"You don't live in the house, then?"

"No, sir. That is, I would not dare to spend the night there any more after what has happened to-night, and I do not know that I care to go back there any more, anyway."

"You really think your life is in danger, then?"

"Undoubtedly, if he comes back, which he probably will. But excuse me, sir, haven't you forgotten something?"

Thad reflected a moment.

"What is that?" he asked.

"The cops."

"That's true. I had forgotten them. I'll run back and tell them that there is no longer any use for their services."

With that Thad returned to the library, where he found the policemen patiently awaiting his

return with the prisoner. They were somewhat taken aback when the detective related the account of McDermot's escape.

"You had better have let one of us gone up with him," remarked one of the officers.

"I wish I had," rejoined Thad. "I would then have been free of the responsibility of his escape at all events. Catch me doing a kindness to a criminal again."

When Thad, accompanied by the policemen, returned to the street, day was just breaking, and he was astonished to see the butler standing on the edge of the sidewalk gazing intently and excitedly at some object down the street.

"What's up?" he asked, approaching the excited butler.

"He's gone!" gasped the latter in a stage whisper.

"Whom?"

"McDermot!"

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes. You had hardly entered the house when a carriage drove up, and the moment it stopped, the old man came out of the house by a side door, jumped into the carriage and drove off as though the Old Nick was after him!"

"Another example of my infernal luck," growled Thad. "Somebody or something has hoodooed me on this case as sure as fate."

CHAPTER XII.

A MELANCHOLY DISCOVERY.

WHEN Thad had dismissed the policemen he and Boggs walked on down the street together, in silence for some time.

At length the detective asked:

"Have you any idea, Boggs, where McDermot will be likely to go?"

"Not much, sir," replied the butler. "Though he may go to his brother's in New Rochelle. He generally goes there when he gets into trouble."

"Is his brother a wealthy man?"

"No, sir, he is very poor."

"Why does he go to him, then?"

"Because his brother is a fisherman and lives in a miserable little cottage near the Sound, and he thinks that nobody would dream of finding him there."

Thad's hopes revived instantly.

If McDermot had gone there it would be a simple matter to trace him up, and very little trouble to discover whether he had gone there or not.

He was elated.

"Do you know the location of his brother's cottage?" he asked.

"Unfortunately, no. I have never been there; but I know that he occupies a poor cottage somewhere near the Sound. I know this from remarks made by the old man himself."

"It is of little consequence," interposed the detective. "I can soon find it."

The butler did not reply at once, but a little later he asked timidly:

"Would you like me to go with you, sir?"

"No. I prefer to go alone on an expedition of this kind. But I will tell you what I wish you would do."

"Yes, sir?"

"I wish, instead of leaving the house, as you contemplate, that you would remain there and watch for his return, and let me know."

The butler was silent, and seemed to shudder at the thought of such an undertaking.

"Of course, if you are afraid, I can furnish you a couple of policemen, whom you will have no difficulty in secreting about the house, inasmuch as you are butler."

Boggs shook his head doubtfully.

"You do not know the old man, sir," he observed in a doleful voice. "You can never know when he is going to pop in upon you, and if he should find me in his house, after what has happened, my skin wouldn't hold water. If you were to be there with me, sir—"

"Do you imagine he will return anyways soon?" interrupted Thad.

"Perhaps not, sir. He is generally away several weeks when a thing of this kind occurs."

"Very well, then. Go back to the house sometime to-day and ask the mistress for a week's vacation. By that time I will have returned from my trip, and if I have not succeeded in running my game to the ground, we will return to the house together."

"All right, sir. I will do that."

Having settled this arrangement, Thad bade the butler good-morning and made his way toward the Gilsey House, to fulfill his promise to Nevin to report before he slept.

Thad expected nothing else than that he should find the young man in bed at that hour—scarcely seven o'clock—but to his surprise, the latter was still sitting up, and for once in his life had remembered the engagement, and was patiently awaiting the detective's return.

He was reading and smoking as usual, and looked up with a yawn when Thad entered the room.

"Well, you have been a deuce of a time," he drawled. "It strikes me that I could discover the character of all the children of Israel in less time than that."

"Possibly it would be easier to learn the character of the parties you mention than the

one I have been looking into," rejoined Thad a little impatiently. "However, it was not the finding out his character so much as the finding of himself that detained me.

"Just like old Mac," drawled Nevin, with a sleepy chuckle. "He's harder to find than a flea on a woollen shirt, but when you do find him, you've got a gem. En, old man?"

"Oh, there is no denying that, Nevin," rejoined the detective with a bitter smile. "He's a daisy, and no mistake!"

"I knew you would like him, and I'm awfully glad you made his acquaintance. So you made a night of it?"

"Sure."

"Of course he treated you royally?"

"Oh, like a prince! Indeed, I do not know that I was ever treated exactly as he treated me before in my life. I am only sorry that I was unable to reciprocate his hospitality."

"Plenty of time, old fellow. Never too late to return hospitality. You'll catch him some day, no doubt, and—"

"I trust I shall."

"You must."

"That is the aim of my life just now."

"By the way, did he suspect you?"

"En?"

"Did he suspect that you were not myself?"

"Not until I took off my wig and whiskers."

"What?"

"Not until I removed my disguise," observed Thad with a sly grin.

Nevin stared at him stupidly.

"I say, old fellow, what the deuce did you want to do that for?" he stammered at length.

"Oh, it became necessary in order to identify myself when I had McDermot arrested."

Now he did stare.

"Arrested?" he gasped.

"That is what I remarked."

"What for, pray?"

"Murder, that's all," coolly.

Nevin sprang to his feet and stared into the detective's face as though he thought the latter had suddenly gone mad.

"I say, what the blazes are you talking about, old fellow?" he finally gasped. "Have you suddenly lost your dizzy head, or was the wine too much for you?"

"Neither," replied the detective, calmly. "Sit down, my boy, and I will tell you all about it."

Nevin sunk into a chair, limp and spiritless as though he had received a stunning blow.

Thad then proceeded to give a detailed account of his adventure from the time he entered the McDermot house till he left it that morning, giving close attention to the details of the murder, and the scenes which followed it.

The young man was too much overwhelmed for a long time after its conclusion to speak. Finally, however, he recovered from the shock and said, drawing more than usual:

"Well, I'll be hanged! But it is just my luck. I never had a friend whom I particularly valued, that didn't go off and steal a horse or kill somebody, or something of the kind. I wonder if associating with me has anything to do with it?"

"Possibly," laughed the detective. "I had better look out for myself, or I shall be doing something next. But now, old fellow, I want to ask you a few questions, and then I will leave you and let you go to bed."

"No bed for me to-day, as I have an engagement at nine. However, go on with your questions."

"In the first place, did you ever hear of a man called Packey Lynch?"

Nevin eyed him curiously.

"I say, old man," he observed at length, "my acquaintance is very large and somewhat varied, but you're too much for me now. The party of whom you speak is not one of the Four Hundred, is he?"

"I hardly think so," laughed the detective.

"In my opinion he belongs to the One Hundred, for his equal cannot be very numerous. But seriously, did you ever see a man about McDermot's size and build and somewhat resembling him, except that he looks more depraved and villainous, in McDermot's company or about the house?"

"Never."

"The reason I ask is, that I forgot to state that the man I arrested in the garden after the murder was not McDermot. At least, I did not believe it was then. However, now that I come to think of the resemblance between the two, and after hearing your statement that you have never seen such a person about, I am inclined to believe that the man in the garden was McDermot in disguise, although he must be an expert in that line. Of course you never heard of McDermot being mixed up with an actress called Lottie?"

"Yes, I did, by Jove!"

"What was the nature of his relations with her?"

"Why, he wanted to marry her, I believe."

"Is that all?"

"So far as I know, it is."

"Did you never hear that she had a child which she put into McDermot's hands, and which he spirited away somehow?"

"You astonish me! No, certainly not!"

"And of course you never heard that he was in the habit of visiting the notorious thieves' den known as Hell's Kitchen?"

Nevin was indignant.

"Look here, old fellow!" he growled with more spirit than was common with him, "if you were not the good friend you are, I should call this blanked impertinence! Do you imagine that if I had known that Mac was the kind of fellow you have discovered him to be, that I would have anything to do with him?"

"Keep your temper, my boy," laughed Thad.

"Certainly I know you wouldn't; but I did not know but you might have heard these things as rumors, which you did not credit. Now, let me ask you a question which you cannot call impertinent."

"Out with it."

"Are you aware that McDermot has a brother living at New Rochelle, very poor and a fisherman?"

Nevin reflected for a moment.

"It strikes me that I have heard something about that, but I forget whether he told me, or whether it was some one else. Why?"

"I have my reasons for wanting to know. You do not know, I presume, what part of New Rochelle he lives in?"

"No, but I can easily find it."

"How?"

"I will go to Mac's house and ask his wife."

"Good! When can you do this?"

"Any time you say."

"Very well, find out for me some time to-day."

"I'll do it with pleasure."

"Have you any idea what time you can call at the house?"

"Let me see. I have an appointment at nine. That will keep me till noon, and I'll go straight to Mac's after that. Where can I see you?"

"I will call here, say at one o'clock, and if you are not back, I will wait for you."

"That will do."

"And now I will leave you," said Thad, rising to go, "as I will probably have to be up all of to-night again, and want to catch a few hours' sleep this morning."

Thad left the hotel and hastened back to his room, but he did not go to bed as had been his intention, for the sight of the den across the street from him reminded him that he had some more work to do that morning. So, instead of retiring, he removed his disguise, dressed himself in his ordinary clothes and went to the police court belonging to that precinct, where he obtained warrants for the arrest of Bull Anderson and his brother for the release of the prisoner the night before, these being the only ones whom he had recognized in the crowd.

Having procured the warrants, he placed them in the hands of the proper officers to execute, and then went to a restaurant for his breakfast, and thence back to his apartments.

By this time it was so late that he was afraid to lie down lest he should oversleep himself, and as he did not feel particularly fatigued anyway, he decided to employ the time between that and twelve in writing letters.

He had been engaged thus for over an hour, and was about through, when he was startled by a timid knock at the door. Upon opening it he found Jimmie standing there.

The little fellow looked scared, and appeared to be thinner and more emaciated than when Thad had last seen him.

He glided softly into the room and stood looking at the detective for a minute or two without speaking.

Thad was in his natural state and Jimmie was not certain that he knew him.

"Are you Mr. Burr?" he finally asked in his thin, timid voice, the detective having not yet addressed him.

"Yes, my boy," replied Thad kindly.

"What is it?"

"I wasn't sure that it was you. You look so different from what I ever saw you. I would like to see you just as you really are once to see how you look."

"You see me as my natural self now, Jimmie. But what do you want this morning?"

"Oh, yes," as though the contemplation of the strange appearance of the detective had caused him to forget what he had come for, "I had nearly forgot. There's been another row over at the house."

"What is it this time, my boy? Not another ghost?"

"No, sir. There's been a whole lot of policemen over there, and they've arrested Bull and Butch, and the old man, that is the king, says he knows who caused it, that it was you, and he's going to make it hot for you. I thought I'd come over and tell you so that you could be on your guard. Don't you think, sir, it would be a good idea to get another room some place?"

There was something strange in the boy's face that the detective did not like. Particularly when he looked the boy straight in the eye. The little fellow would drop his eye and appear to avoid Thad's gaze.

Without answering his question, therefore,

the detective scrutinized him severely for some minutes, and then asked:

"Jimmie, how did those fellows discover the location of my room, and how did they find out that I was not the real Sheeny Ike?"

The boy dropped his head, but after a little raised his bright eyes to those of the detective again, and replied in his usual frank manner:

"I told 'em, sir."

Thad was speechless for five minutes.

He was alternately in a fury at the boy's piffidy or stupidity, in a state of admiration at his frankness and finally rendered good-natured by his childish simplicity.

At one time he was half inclined to shake the little fellow, but altered his mind inside of five minutes and only laughed.

"What did you do that for, my boy?" he asked.

"Cause Bull made me," was the reply.

"How did he know that you knew?"

"He saw me coming over here."

"Still he would not have known that I lived here, if you had not told him."

"Yes he would, sir. You see, the night you came in and acted like a drunken man, Mag watched which way you went, and then when I went back from here Bull met me and made me tell where I'd been."

"But how could you have told them that it was I who was playing the part of Sheeny Ike? You were nearly frightened to death when you came back here and saw me. You saw none of them after that before Bull and the gang came up."

The boy burst out laughing.

"I only pretended that I was afraid. I knew it was you all the time."

Thad was astonished. He did not know what to make of the boy.

One thing he was quite certain of, however, and that was that he was the greatest liar he had ever met.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VENERABLE SHADOW.

By the time Thad had finished his conference with Jimmie it was noon, and he dismissed the boy with a warning not to relate anything he had seen or heard, and prepared to go.

"I shan't do it any more," declared the boy, following him down stairs.

"How am I to know that?" demanded the detective, sternly. "You have deceived me once, and when I catch a boy in a lie I can never believe him again."

Jimmie was silent till they reached the bottom of the stairs and Thad had turned to leave him.

Then he called after the detective:

"I say, sir, are you going to move?"

"No," was the gruff response.

"Then they'll be after you."

"Let them come."

"You don't believe me, then?"

"No."

"I'll never tell the truth again."

This speech appeared to be delivered to himself.

"What's that?" asked the detective, surprised at the remark, stopping to survey the lad.

"Why, if I hadn't told you the truth, you wouldn't 'a' known that I told them."

That set Thad to thinking. He had evidently made a mistake in cutting the boy so sharply, for he saw now that the little fellow had striven to be honest, in spite of his evil training at the den.

"Well, my boy," he observed, returning and taking the lad by the hand, "I will trust you this time. But if you want me to be a friend, you must not deceive me again. You did not tell them that I was Sheeny Ike, did you?"

Jimmie burst out laughing and ran away.

"That boy is in sad need of reforming," he mused, as he walked on, "and it will take a good deal of discipline to undo the work of Hell's Kitchen."

It was after one o'clock when he reached the Gilsey House, and he went up to Nevin's room at once, but when he knocked on the door there was no response.

A dozen knocks resulted in a similar manner, and he went down stairs again to wait for the young man in the office.

Another hour went by and still he had not returned, and Thad took a walk.

After spending half an hour in this way, he returned to the hotel and went up to the room, although the clerk said he did not believe Nevin had returned.

This the detective found to be the truth, when he had knocked a number of times, and he was about to descend once more. But while he was waiting for the elevator to come down another one came up, stopped at that floor, and somebody got off.

Thad did not recognize him at first, and probably never would have done so, had not the person spoken to him.

Then he saw that it was Nevin, but such a sight as he was! His hat was smashed, his clothes nearly torn off him, his face scratched and he had a black eye. Another man was leading him, and now that the detective came to notice Nevin's companion, he saw that it was the butler.

"Why, what on earth is the matter, Nevin?" inquired Thad.

Nevin made no other reply than to beckon him to come into the room.

Once inside, the young man sunk, wearily, into a chair.

"Don't ask me to do any more detective work, old fellow," he groaned.

"Why, what has happened to you?" again demanded Thad, staring at him curiously.

"What?"

And then he subsided into silence.

After some moments he took a cigar from the box, lighted it and said wearily:

"Sit down, old man, and have a cigar, and I'll tell you all about it."

Thad complied, and when he was smoking comfortably, Nevin resumed, a trifle more wearily, if possible, than before:

"You remember, old fellow, you went round there last night made up to look like myself?"

"Yes," rejoined the detective.

"Well, according to agreement, I went round there awhile ago looking, as nearly as possible, like myself, as I thought. But the folks wouldn't have it that way. It would have been all right if I had taken the hall-boy's hint not to come in; but I didn't."

Here he paused, and Thad said:

"Well?"

"Well, I didn't take the hall boy's advice, and went in. I first went into the parlor, as I usually do, but found nobody there, as I climbed the stairs and knocked at Marion's door, just as I have done a thousand times. Pretty soon she opened the door, and as soon as she set eyes upon me, she began to scream. I did not know what to think of it. I thought the woman must be mad and attempted to approach her with the intention of soothing her, but she retreated and screamed louder than ever. Just then a burly footman glided up and wanted to know what I was doing there anyway. This made me mad, and I told him to go to blazes, at which he took me by the collar.

"At this the woman told the footman to throw me out as I was a dirty detective."

"Then for the first time it all dawned upon me. They had mistaken me for you. Serious as the situation was, I could not help laughing, but my laughter was short-lived. The next instant the burly brute of a footman began dragging me toward the head of the stairs, and this exasperated me, and I hit him in the face.

"Ye vill, vill ye, young'un?" growled the cockney cur, and let me have in the eye.

"And then we had it rough and tumble for five minutes, sometimes he had the best of it and sometimes I had. Finally we reached the top of the stairs and rolled down.

"I was the first to regain my feet at the bottom, and made for him. Well, in about five minutes his English face looked like an English roast, and he was about winded besides, but just then two others came to his assistance and the first thing I knew I was on the sidewalk and couldn't get up. And this man came and offered to help me to the hotel, called a hack and—well, here I am."

"I am very sorry for you, old fellow," cried Thad, unable, nevertheless, to keep from laughing.

"Reserve your sympathy," retorted Nevin testily. "Or if you have any to spare, lavish it on the burly footman."

"Did you use him up pretty badly?"

"Well! You see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm respectable compared with him. Why, sir, he's got a pair of eyes that would take a medal on the Bowery, and his face looks like a Hamburger steak!"

"That is some satisfaction, anyway," laughed the detective. "And after all you failed to get the information you were after."

"How was I to get any information?" screamed Nevin.

"Keep your temper, old fellow. I have no fault to find with you, and will doubtless make the discovery myself."

Then turning to Boggs, the detective went on:

"There is one important matter which I neglected to ask you about before we parted this morning. When the murder was committed in the garden last night, did you see who did it?"

The butler looked puzzled.

"To tell you the truth, sir, I did not," he replied at length. "I heard the thrust, quickly followed by the scream, and then I saw a form jump out and run away, but it was too dark to see his face. I thought the man you arrested was the one who committed the murder."

"So did I," rejoined the detective, "and such may be the case. But I am more than half-inclined now to believe that that man was none other than McDermot in disguise."

"Ob, no, sir," interposed the butler quickly. "You will pardon me, sir, but I am sure you are wrong about that."

"Did you ever see the man about before?" asked Thad.

The butler appeared a little troubled over this question, but he finally replied in a timid sort of way:

"It makes no difference now that I am away

from there, and it is not likely that I will ever go back again. I have seen him about frequently."

Thad pricked up his ears at this revelation. It looked as though the secret was about to come out at last.

"Who is he?" he inquired.

"They call him Grosvenor," was the reply.

"Who called him that?"

"All the folks."

"Was he a friend of McDermot?"

"Yes, sir—that is, I suppose so. I knew he was a friend of the missus."

"Did you ever see him in company with the old man, as you call him, Boggs? In other words, did you ever see them together?"

The butler was silent, and appeared to be trying to think.

"Upon my word, I could not swear that I have. I never thought of the matter before. But now that you mention it, I cannot recall that I ever did see them together. I know that Grosvenor was with the missus a good deal and often went out with her."

"Now cudgel your memory, Boggs, and see if you don't recall that this generally if not always occurred when the old man was away."

Again the butler paused to reflect.

"I believe you are right, sir," he finally said.

"Although I never thought of it before."

"Just what I thought," exclaimed the detective, with a new light in his countenance.

"Now, just give it another shake, and see if you don't remember that this fellow was around at the time McDermot was away after abducting the actress's child."

"No, sir," he answered promptly, "he was not."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"How do you know? That is, what circumstance do you recall that impresses the fact so firmly on your memory?"

"There are several. In the first place, the missus was away a good part of the time herself and the house was shut up; and then when she did return she shut herself up and would see no one."

"And you are sure that this man Grosvenor never called upon her during all that time?"

"Positive."

"Of course you would have known it if he had?"

"There is no doubt of it."

"Very well. I am satisfied that your theory is correct, but it does not overthrow mine that McDermot and Grosvenor are one and the same. If the latter had visited Mrs. McDermot during her husband's absence, it would have proved that he had returned in disguise to see his family; and as he did not, it only shows that he was afraid to return even in disguise. My theory works either way."

The butler shook his head.

"I am sorry, sir, but I cannot agree with you. There is nothing in common between the two men, except a slight resemblance. Otherwise they are different as any two men I ever saw, and I had an excellent opportunity for studying both of them."

"You will excuse me, old fellow," interposed Nevin at this point. "But I have got to see a doctor, and have myself done up. Kindly touch the button, please."

The butler, true to his instinct as a servant, sprang to the button and pushed it, and presently a bell-boy appeared, and was dispatched for a doctor.

In the mean time Thad had risen, stretched his legs and announced his intention of going.

"I shall leave for New Rochelle this evening, Boggs," he observed. "Where can I see you on my return?"

The butler gave him his address, after which the detective took leave of Nevin and left the hotel.

The butler went down in the elevator with him, and the two men stood talking on the corner of Broadway and Thirtieth street for some moments. While they were standing there a white-bearded, bent old man tottered up and asked for charity.

Thad thought nothing of the incident and gave the old fellow some money, at which he was so profuse with his thanks and God-bless-yous that the detective's attention was attracted to the beggar, and when he glanced at him, he saw that the old chap was staring at him so sharply with a pair of very black and what appeared to be sinister eyes, that it caused a sense of uneasiness.

But as the old man hobbled away again soon after, the detective thought no more of the circumstance, and shortly parted from the butler and took an up-town car.

It was growing dark when he jumped off the car at Thirty-ninth street and started to walk across to Eleventh avenue, and Thad hurried on rapidly, his mind busy with his projected trip.

When he reached Eighth avenue, he stopped at a restaurant long enough to get some supper, and taking an evening paper was soon absorbed in its contents.

He sat facing the door, or rather the window at the side of the door, and when the waiter

came to put his meal on the table, Thad happened to glance toward the window, as any one is apt to do, when to his surprise he saw the face of the identical old man peering in the window at him.

The sight so irritated him that he was seriously contemplating going out and demanding of the old chap what he meant by following him, when the face suddenly disappeared from the window.

Thad kept a close watch on the window from that on till the close of his meal, but the face never came back.

And when he went out of the restaurant, he looked in every direction for the old man, but he had vanished.

A trifle troubled in mind over the circumstance, the detective hastened on to his room, and reached it without any further adventure.

Making himself up as an old farmer, Thad locked his door and made his way toward the Grand Central Depot, and as he had a few minutes to spare before the train would go, he strolled about the large waiting-room.

He had not walked five minutes before he became aware that some one was following him.

A half side-glance revealed the fact that it was the old man again.

Thad turned upon him suddenly and demanded sternly:

"Well, sir, what are you following me for?"

The old man cringed, smiled sadly and rubbed his hands imploringly.

"Help a poor old man?" he whined.

"See here, sir!" thundered the detective, "in my opinion you are a fraud! You accosted me in front of the Gilsey House not an hour ago, and I again saw you peering in the window at me on Eighth avenue, and now you are here. Now skip, or I shall call a policeman and have you run in!"

The beggar was about to reply, when he looked past Thad and saw one of the depot watchmen approaching, so he turned abruptly and hobbled away.

"Was that 'ere ole bloke a-beggin'?" inquired the watchman, when he came up to the detective.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"O! only knows that he's been a-hangin' roun' here fer a week er so," growled the watchman, "an' O! I've been a-thryin' ter git me bonds an him; but he allus mosies whin O! comes in sight. Faix, O! I'll hov'im yit. Moind thot!"

Just then the gong sounded, and Thad hurried through the gate with the rest of the crowd, and was soon seated in the car.

The train had just got under way, when he happened to look across the car, and there, to his surprise and consternation, sat the old man!

CHAPTER XIV.

ON A HOT SCENT.

THE appearance of the old man for the fourth time convinced Thad that he was unquestionably following him for some reason, and the conviction exasperated him.

Nevertheless, after some reflection, he decided to make no demonstration and appear not to notice his venerable shadower, but at the same time to keep his eye on him and see what he was up to.

Now that he looked him over more carefully, the detective noticed that the old man was fairly well-dressed, too well dressed, indeed, for a beggar, and this convinced him more than ever that he was an impostor.

The old man affected not to notice that Thad was in the car, if, indeed, he did, keeping his eyes continually in another direction.

After watching the old chap for some time, Thad ceased to look at him and turned his attention to his paper, and it was not long before he had forgotten his existence.

The short run to New Rochelle was soon made, and the detective left the train, actually forgetting to watch for his shadower until he got some distance from the depot, when he suddenly remembered the odd circumstance, and looked about for the old fellow, but he was nowhere to be seen.

Instead of being a relief to him, this circumstance only worried him the more, for he was haunted with the belief that his strange Nemesis had taken extra precautions to escape discovery, and would turn up when least expected.

Thad did not make his appearance at any inn or public house, but shaped his course at once for the beach, near which stood a number of fishermen's huts. Approaching the first one he came to, he inquired for a man by the name of McDermot.

But the person who came to the door had never heard of any one of that name, and he went to the next, and the next, and so on until he had canvassed the whole row of shanties facing the beach, and none of the inmates knew or had ever heard of McDermot.

Thad was nonplused for the moment, but not entirely discouraged, and turned away from the beach and returned to the main part of the town, and entering a drug-store, found and consulted a Directory.

Yes, there were McDermots there—no end of them—and one of them was a fisherman. The

detective's hopes revived. He took the address of the McDermot who was said to be a fisherman and once more started upon his search.

Upon inquiry he learned that the street mentioned in the Directory as the one upon which McDermot lived was away off in the suburbs at the opposite end of the town from that at which he had been looking for his residence.

However, as the town was not very large, it did not take him long to walk to the street in question and, although it was very dark and the street entirely unlighted, he finally, by the assistance of his bull's-eye, succeeded in finding the number.

It was a neat little cottage with a general air of comfort about it, and Thad felt something approaching a thrill as he advanced toward the house with the feeling that he was about to tree his game so successfully.

A knock at the door caused it to be opened, and a stout, burly young man stood before the detective.

"Does Mr. McDermot live here?" asked Thad. "Yes, sir," was the response. "That is my name."

Thad was disappointed. This young man could not certainly be the brother of the man he was after.

"Ab," faltered the detective, "you are not the— May I ask whether you have a brother in New York or not?"

"I have," was the astounding reply, and Thad thought he had struck it right after all.

"Pardon me, but is your brother visiting you at present?"

"No, sir." Thad's heart sunk, but he would make another effort.

"I trust you won't think me impertinent, young man, but would you mind telling me whether you know of your brother's present whereabouts, and if so, where he can be found?"

The young fellow stared at him in amazement.

"Why, at home, I reckon," he cried, looking a little alarmed. "At least he was at last accounts. Ain't nothin' happened to him, hez they, ez you've heered tell?"

"Well, yes—that is, he has disappeared from home, and it is the impression of his family that he is out here with you, as he is in the habit of visiting you for long periods at a time."

The fellow stared more wildly than before, and seemed to be gulping down something that had come up in his throat.

"Why, no, sir, he ain't heer, an' hezn't bin, an' what's more, he's not bin in the habit of visitin' me fer long. But haew long's he bin a-missin'?"

"Only since last night."

"Dew tell!" "Who's that?" came a voice from inside, which appeared to emanate from some aged person.

"Why, heer's a man ez sez thet Kiar's a-missin'," responded the young man at the door.

Kiar? mused the detective. This was not the name. Possibly there was some mistake, after all.

"Pardon me," interposed Thad, quickly. "What is your brother's Christian name?"

"Hezykiar," he replied, "but we call him Kiar fer short."

"What was his business?"

"Porter."

Thad was disgusted.

"There is some mistake here," he said. "It is not your brother who is missing, after all. The man for whom I am looking is not a porter. He is a wealthy man."

"Oa!" and the young chap's face relaxed its troubled expression.

The detective had been looking at the ground for some seconds, plunged in thought. At length he raised his eyes, preparatory to asking another question, but during the interval in which he had had his eyes averted another person had appeared at the door, and when Thad looked up again his eye fell upon the face, and the sight of it startled him.

It was the old man whom he had seen in the city, and again in the car.

He stared at the old man, and the latter gazed mildly at him, but showed no indication of recognition.

Thad was about to address the old man, when he interrupted him by inquiring:

"What was that 'bout Kiar bein' gone?"

"Nothin', dad," retorted the young man impatiently. "It wasn't him."

And then before the detective had time to resume his inquiry, the old man vanished.

He then addressed himself to the young man again.

"Are there any other McDermots who are fishermen?" he asked.

The fellow reflected a moment, and then replied:

"Yes. I think there's one ez lives deawn by the beach. I don't rightly know whereabouts, but deawn their summers."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Not much. I've see'd him frequent when he waz eaut, an' sometimes when he waz a-comin' in."

"Have you ever noticed that he had a person with him whose dress and general appearance would indicate that he was from the city?"

The young man shook his head thoughtfully.

"N—no—o, I don't know's I hev," he drawled reflectively. "Whut yew say 'beaut a city feller bein' with a fisherman 'minds me uv another chap, though."

"Who is that?"

"Grosvener."

Thad's heart gave a sudden bound.

The sound of the name struck him like an electric shock.

He could hardly conceal his enthusiasm.

"Grosvener, eh?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, John Grosvener."

"What sort of a looking man is this brother of his?"

"Tall an' dark. Hez a kinder mean look ez though'd steal ef he got a good chance."

"That's the fellow! Where does he live? I mean his brother who is a fisherman."

"At the fur end uv the town, near the beach, an' 'beaut the middle of the row of heauses ye'll see thar."

"Thank you. I will have trouble in finding it."

"Ef ye think ye ca'n't, I don't mind going wi' ye."

"Thank you, my good fellow; but I don't want to trouble you."

"No trouble 't all. Ain't doin' nothin' these cold days much, an' jes' soon walk a little ez not."

"Very well, then, I shall be glad of your company."

"Jes' wait a minit till I git my caout an' hat an' I'm wi' ye."

In five minutes they were on the move toward the beach.

The night was sharp but clear and pleasant, and the two men walked briskly.

As they went along Thad took occasion to ask the young man something about the old man whom he had addressed as father.

"The old gentleman I saw at the house is your father, is he?" he observed.

"No, sir. He's my wife's father."

"Oh. Does he ever—is he in the habit of begging sometimes?" inquired the detective timidly.

"Beggin'?" and the young man stared at him with open mouth.

"Yes—asking for charity?"

"Not's I knows on. Great hoakey!" and the young man whistled.

"The reason I asked," pursued the detective, "is that—well, there is no harm in telling you the whole story, I presume."

"'Course not. Tell't."

Thad then went on to relate how the old man had accosted him first in front of the hotel, later peered through the window at him, accosted him again in the depot and finally appeared to him in the train.

The young man chuckled softly.

"That 'ceauts fer his goin' tew teawn ever day fer the last two weeks," he remarked, in a musing tone. "Ye see, the old'un's a bit off in his head at times, but he's harmless. Jes' like a child."

"He has no need to beg, however?"

"I reckon not! He's got lots o' money in the bank an' owns lots o' property heer. Owns the heause we live in."

"His begging, then, is just a freak of his lunacy?"

"I reckon ye'd call't that."

Thad felt a little sold to think that he had been worried over the freak of a harmless imbecile, but congratulated himself on having abstained from making a scene in the car.

He, therefore, dismissed the subject from his mind and commenced talking upon other matters, and the two men chatted pleasantly along until they reached the row of dingy huts facing the beach.

Here the young man taking the lead, turned at right angles and strode along for a hundred yards or so, and finally stopped in front of one of the humblest and most dilapidated shanties of the lot.

"Heer 't is," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of the hut, which was in darkness.

"This is where Grosvener lives, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"They appear to be abed."

"Sh'dn't wonder ef they wuz. Most o' the fishermen goes to bed this time o' yer by dark. They ain't got nothin' else to dew, skeercely, but sleep an' eat."

"You don't do any fishing this time of year, then?"

"Not uv no 'count. We goes eaut one't in awhile when it's warm like an' rainin', but don't ketch much."

"It is hardly worth my while to arouse them to-night, I think," mused the detective. "I presume they are stirring early in the morning."

"Yep. Afore daylight."

"That will be the best time to come, then. I will walk back with you as far as the hotel."

Thad made a mental note of the position of the cabin and its surroundings, so that he would

have no trouble in finding it in the morning and then strolled back toward the town.

As they went along he asked the fisherman where the best hotel was, and the latter gave him the desired information, after which they parted, the detective promising to see him again before he left the town.

It was so late when Thad reached the tavern that it was some difficulty to get anything to eat, but a liberal tip finally brought matters about satisfactorily, and after a hearty supper, he went to his room and retired.

He was up and out long before any of the inmates of the hotel were stirring, and made his way directly toward the beach.

The weather had changed during the night, and it was warm and muggy, and a steady rain was falling.

"This will be a favorable day for my business," mused Thad as he strolled toward the beach. "The fisherman will most likely go out upon the Sound and leave his brother at home—supposing the latter is here," he added, for it now occurred to him for the first time since his discovery of Grosvener's whereabouts that his brother—that is, McDermot—might possibly not be there after all.

However, he hastened on to the hut, and was soon on the beach again.

A thick, impenetrable spray shrouded the beach and concealed every object upon it, so that it was with considerable difficulty that he traced his way to the hut again. And even when he reached the spot which he had made a mental note of the previous night, he was uncertain about the exact hut, for the reason that a boat which had lain bottom up in front and only a short distance from the hut the night before, had been taken away.

He was still pondering as to which of the two huts to approach first, when a waterman came along of whom he inquired which was Grosvener's cabin, and he was informed that it was neither of the two, but at least a hundred yards further along the beach.

Thad felt a little disgusted at his own stupidity, and hurried away toward the place described by his informant.

As he neared the spot, he saw that the boat was still there, and while his eyes were still turned in its direction, his attention was suddenly attracted in another by the crunching sound of footsteps in the sand, and looking in the direction, was surprised to see the old man with the venerable beard.

The sight irritated the detective, for some inexplicable reason, in spite of the fact that he was only a harmless imbecile; but he contrived to banish the thought of him, and pushed on to the hut. Meanwhile the old man had disappeared in the fog.

A lively smoke was arising from the chimney of the hut, and cheered Thad with the assurance that the inmates were still in, and a knock brought a stalwart female promptly to the door.

"Is Mr. Grosvener at home?" inquired the detective.

"He's not," was the discouraging reply. "He went out half an hour ago."

"Where did he go?"

"Oh, the Sound, of course." And the woman eyed him suspiciously.

"Thank you, ma'am. Have you any notion what part of the Sound he generally fishes in?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"You don't think of lookin' fer him on the water, I reckon?" she snickered.

"I might, if I knew where to find him," replied Thad, laughing as though he had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"Wal, then, if ye're in such a hurry thet ye can't wait till to-night, ye'll maybe find him somewhere round Huckleberry Island," she rejoined, with another burst of laughter, wiping her eyes with her apron.

"His brother went with him, I suppose," continued Thad.

The woman started, dropped her apron and stared at him wildly.

"His brother? No. There's nobuddy with him but Benny," she snapped, and shut the door in his face.

CHAPTER XV.

TOO INQUISITIVE BY HALF.

THE woman's actions were somewhat of a setback to the detective, but they convinced him pretty thoroughly that McDermot was there, fully as much so as though she had said he was not.

The only question was whether he was with his brother or in the hut.

It appeared more likely that he would be in the latter place, and Thad decided to keep watch upon it for awhile.

He sauntered about the beach in a listless sort of way, appearing to have no particular object in view, and the sailors and fishermen who passed and saw him supposed he was some old farmer in from the country and taking his early morning walk. All the same he kept the Grosvener hut well under his eye, and no movement about the place escaped his observation.

As he strolled back and forth he would pass in front of the hut, but never happened to come in contact with any one for a long time; but at

length when he was passing, the door suddenly opened and the woman with whom he had had the conversation came out.

She had evidently started upon some mission or other and did not expect to see the detective again, and her movements were so brisk that she came slap against him before she realized that he was there.

Then she recognized him and sprung back in a state of fury.

"What, yew heer yit, yew old hayseed?" she screeched. "I thought yew was a-goin' eaut on the Sound tew look fer Calvin!"

"So I am as soon as the man who is to row me out gets ready," rejoined the detective, that being the first excuse that popped into his head.

"Wal, don't be a-hangin' reaud beer!" she snorted.

"My dear woman, do you own the whole beach?"

"No, I don't own none uv it. But I know yew ain't heer fer no good nohow!"

Thad was never a man to quarrel with a woman, but now that he was in for it, he considered that he might as well profit by it.

In flouncing out of the hut she left the door partly ajar, and as they stood when she began her harangue he was nearest the door.

So, without more ado, or deigning to answer her last speech, he made a spring at the door and threw it wide open.

This was such a surprise to the woman that she stood transfixed for several seconds, and then made a spring for him with her clinched fist.

But she was too slow.

Thad had seen all he wanted to, and dodged away in time to escape the blow which she had aimed at him.

He had had a glimpse of the whole inside of the one-roomed hut, and saw that nobody was inside except some children, and he was satisfied with the knowledge that McDermot was not there.

He thereupon turned and walked away without paying any more attention to the brawling woman, who, on the other hand, kept up her harangue as long as he could hear her, and probably much longer.

Thad returned to the hotel and had his breakfast, and while he was partaking of it, his mind was busy as usual.

He went over the ground of the case upon which he was working from the beginning, and, speculatively, to the end.

He was far from satisfied with his progress and harassed with doubt on many points.

He had started with the discovery of the murdered man near Hell's Kitchen, and had been led by circumstances or clues, many of which were probably false, to the present point.

And yet when he came to scrutinize the situation carefully, there appeared to be a connecting chain from one end to the other.

Assuming that the man whom he had heard talking to the woman in the Anderson dive was McDermot, he felt that he was on the right scent, but if that should prove false, he was a long way at sea.

Again he might be all wrong in accepting the theory that McDermot had come to New Rochelle. One thing that puzzled him in this connection, was the fact that his brother—if such this man really was—went by a different name. Was it possible that the name of McDermot was an alias? Or had his brother committed some crime which had compelled him to change his name? Possibly neither was the truth. It might be that the pretended relationship was a sham, assumed for a purpose.

Another thing that puzzled him was the fact that McDermot had come out to stop at the hut of this miserably poor wretch, where he must suffer great privation, besides rendering himself more conspicuous than if he had remained in the city, where he could bury himself for years without danger of discovery.

When Thad came out of the dining-room the landlord, who was a fat, jolly man, looked him over and, evidently being a little hungry for gossip, began by commenting upon the weather, and went from that to farming; asked Thad what the prospects were for a good wheat crop, and so on, to which he answered in such a way that the landlord never suspected that he was not a farmer.

Thad, finding him inclined to gossip, decided to see if he could not pump him a little.

After talking on various subjects, he finally asked:

"Are you pretty well acquainted in town?"

The fat landlord laughed and shook his sides. "Acquainted?" he roared. "Why, bless you, sir, I know every chick and child in the hull place."

"Um. Know McDermot, I reckon?"

"Old Zeke?"

"Yes," at a venture.

"Reckon I do."

"Little queer up here, ain't he?" said Thad, tapping his own forehead.

"Don't you believe a bit of it. People thinks he is; but between me and you, he's as sane as any on us."

"He acts a little strange sometimes, don't he?"

"Oh, well, yes, he acts strange; but that's all

fer effect. He's as big a rascal as ever went un-

lung, 'twixt me and you!"

"How is his son?"

"John?"

"Yes," at a venture again.

"He's a good feller. Don't take arter the old man a bit. Kiar's the trump, though, and so's Ed."

"Let me see," mused the detective, "Kiar is a porter, isn't he?"

"A porter? Not much! He's a saloon-keeper. Runs one o' the lowest dives on the Bowery."

"You don't say! What does Ed do?"

"Gambler, and some say a thief! I shouldn't wonder if they was purty nigh right—specially if he takes arter the old man."

"Was he a gambler?"

"Was he? He is yit."

Thad began to see daylight now.

The old chap had gone broke, as they say, and was trying to raise a stake by begging.

After a moment's silence, Thad continued:

"Kioow Grosvener, I s'pose?"

"The fisherman?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I've knowed him ever sence he was a boy."

"He has a brother who lives in the city hasn't he?"

"No."

Thad was stunned.

"Are you sure?" he finally ventured.

"Am I sure? Am I sure that I have two brothers? An I sure that I have three boys? Am I sure that I'm a-livin', or that you're standin' thar?"

The detective was speechless.

His trip had apparently been for nothing, and his hopes were pretty well dampened.

And then they suddenly revived again.

"Who is the man who comes out once in a while to visit Grosvener?" he asked.

The landlord stared at him.

"A man from the city," continued Thad.

"Somewhat dressy but not particularly handsome—that is, has a mean kind of a look."

"Never beard of anybody of the kind," rejoined the landlord tartly.

"Still, there might be such a man, mightn't there, without you knowing it?"

"Thar might," admitted the landlord. "But it's hardly likely. I know 'most everybody that visits town fer long."

Thad left the hotel soon after with the conviction that, while a good deal that the landlord had told him was true, a good deal of it also was not, and upon the whole did not affect his theory in the least.

He went direct to McDermot's house and was fortunate enough to find the young man at home, although the old man was gone as usual.

"Did ye find the place this mornin'?" asked McDermot.

"Oh yes," replied the detective.

"Didn't find him to hum, I reckon?"

"No, he had gone out on the Sound, and I've come to engage you to row me over to Huckleberry island."

"Crack! What dew yew want go over thar fer?" asked the young man in surprise.

"To meet Grosvener, if possible."

"Why don't yew wait till he comes hum to-night?"

Thad was a little impatient at his inquisitiveness, but concealed it and answered good-naturedly:

"Because it is desirable that I should see him to-day, if possible."

"But the chances is thet ye won't see him when yew dew git over thar. 'Sides, dew yew know whut kind uv a place the island is, sir?"

"No, I do not, and care as little," retorted the detective, impatiently. "If you wish to row me over for the money, say so, and if not I will get somebody else."

McDermot shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I'll row yew over, sir, an' glad," he said.

"Only—"

"Very well, then, let us be off at once," interrupted Thad, who began to see that, like most people of his class, this fellow would keep on chattering all day if he were not shut off some way.

The young man made no further remonstrance, arose and prepared to go.

Half an hour later they were at the beach and the young man soon had his boat afloat and the two embarked.

Few words passed between them for the first half of the two or more miles' pull. Thad sat in the stern and managed the tiller while the stalwart young Hercules tugged at the oars.

The frail craft skimmed rapidly along under his powerful strokes. The mist or fog still hung over the water, but had risen a few feet above it, so that you could see objects some distance away, and the sea was as calm as an inland lake, but the quiet ripples were blue-black and appeared to emit little whiffs of smoke as they shimmered in the dull light.

The occasional glances which the detective bestowed upon the man at the oars showed him a face somewhat sullen, and yet apparently full of anxiety.

He could not understand this, and attributed

the sullenness to his own hasty words before they started from the house.

Feeling that he had wounded the poor fellow's feelings without cause, Thad experienced a sense of self-reproach. He realized that it was better to keep on good terms with the young man, so he finally said:

"I hope you won't take what I said before we started to heart, my boy. I spoke hastily; but it was because I was impatient to get started. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"Ho, I'd forgot all 'beaut thet," cried the boatman, bursting into a broad grin. "I wuz jes' thinkin' it wuz fuuny fer yew tew come over heer sich a day ez this, an' kinder wonderin' whut yew wanted so pertic'ler with Grosvener thet yew c'u'dn't wait till night."

Thad saw that he had made a mistake.

His apology had had no other effect than start his eternal chatter and interrogating.

"I have particular business with him, that is all," he replied, dryly.

"I didn't kneaw but it was somethin' 'beaut the man thet's visitin' him from the city."

Here was a surprise. The fellow was not so stupid as he appeared, and had inferred from Thad's inquiries that this mysterious man from the city was the occasion of the strange trip to the island. No wonder the fellow's face had shown perplexity.

He was at a loss for an answer to his last remarks, and while he was still reflecting upon what to say, the fellow went on:

"I hear tell ez he's a purty bad case, an' pop 'lowed thet yew mought be a detective arter him, though I tole pop thet yew looked too much like a farmer fer that, but pop said ez yew was disguised, an' thet them whiskers wuz false 'stead o' yer own. But pop's allus talkin', an' I don't mind whut he sez."

Up to this last remark the detective was in a quandary how he was going to deal with this inquisitive parrot, but now it was an easy task.

"You are right, my boy," he rejoined. "The old man is entirely too ready with his judgment. I am glad that you are too keen to take any notice of his wild theories."

"Yew be n't a detective then, be n't yew?"

"Certainly not. What could have put such an idea into his old head?"

"I don't kneaw, 'less it wuz somethin' he heard yew say in the city. He sez thet he heard yew talkin' tew a man on Broadway, an' yew said thet yew wuz -comin' up tew New Rochelle after somebuddy."

Here was a thunderbolt. The old scamp had somehow penetrated his disguise and knew that he was the same man who had given him the money in front of the Gilsey House. The landlord was right when he had said that the old man was a rascal. Thad now believed him to be more. He believed him to be a spy for some of the parties concerned in the case upon which he was at work.

Was it possible, with such a father, that the son was not mixed up in it also?

If he was, the detective's case was hopeless.

There was one thing that spoke favorably for the son, and that was his simplicity and inquisitiveness, which seemed to indicate that he was lamentably ignorant. However, that might be assumed, like the father's poverty.

"As I said before," interposed the detective, impatiently, "your father assumes too much, and not that alone, he talks too much for his own good. He never saw me on Broadway, that I know of; and if he did, he certainly did not hear me tell anybody that I was coming here after any one!"

The young man laughed boisterously.

"Yew hev'n't got a very good mem'ry, sir," he laughed. "Yew tole me last night thet the ole man met yew on Broadway an' ast yew fer money."

Thad was caught, and he determined to make the best of it.

"Since you remind me, I believe he did ask me for money; but the circumstance had entirely escaped my memory."

The young man laughed again.

"An' yew wasn't fixed up then ez yew air neaw, wuz yew? I mean ez tew the whiskers an' things."

Thad saw that the further he allowed the young scamp to go the deeper he was likely to involve him, so he determined to cut him off at once. So he said:

"I hired you to row me to the island, young man, not to ask questions. How much further is it?"

McDermot turned his head about and looked behind him, and almost instantly looked back at the detective again.

"There's Grosvener's boat jes' ahead uv us, an' makin' the curve o' the island, sir."

Thad strained his eyes in the direction, and sure enough, just visible through the fog, he could see a boat containing two men and a boy.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PERILOUS TRAIL.

AT sight of the game Thad's enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"Row for your life!" he cried excitedly, as though there was the least possible danger of the

men escaping, when they did not even know that they were being pursued.

The boatman grinned, but bent to his oars a little more vigorously than before, and said nothing.

A few minutes brought them in full view of the island, and only a short distance from it.

The island is a rocky, barren place, with the exception of a few sickly trees and huckleberry bushes. The latter grow in abundance, and, with the exception of the excellent fishing near it, furnish the only inducement for any one to visit the island.

Thad had kept the other boat in sight as long as he could, but as his boat neared the island the other rounded a point and was shut off from view by a jutting rock.

"I will leave the matter entirely with you, McDermot," he said. "All I desire is to head those fellows off, and you may do it in the easiest way you know how."

The boatman shrugged his shoulders and leant to his oars, and although he said nothing, it was evident he was still wondering why the detective was so anxious to overhaul them out at sea instead of waiting till they got back to shore.

It was not many more minutes before the little craft rounded the point, but to the detective's surprise as well as that of the boatman, the other boat was not in sight.

"That's funny," observed McDermot. "I'm sure they couldn't have rounded the other point, and I'm blessed if I know where they went."

Thad could naturally furnish no suggestion, but strained his eyes in the vain hope of espying them.

And just then the boatman appeared to be blessed with an inspiration, for his face lighted up, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I hev it! They've run in the slip over thar," jerking his head in the direction of a rocky point behind which appeared to be an indentation or slip.

A few more strokes brought the bow of the boat around the point alluded to, and sure enough, there was the other boat, but it was tied up and the late occupants were gone.

"Aha!" cried McDermot. "They've 'scaped' onto the island. Never mind, we'll hev 'em."

McDermot ran up into the slip alongside of the other boat and, springing ashore, and taking a few turns with his painter around a projecting rock, waited for the detective to get ashore.

Thad was not long in getting on *terra firma*, and then the boatman asked:

"Shall I go wi' yew, sir, or stay here an' mind the boat?"

Thad took a hasty survey of the island and saw that it was very small—scarcely larger than a couple of city blocks.

"Suit yourself," he replied. "If you think the boat requires watching you may as well stay with it. It will not take me more than an hour or so to explore the whole island. And, as he doubtless will not expect me—"

The detective checked himself in time, but he had nearly betrayed himself.

He glanced furtively at the boatman and found that inquisitive individual's hungry eyes fixed upon him.

And when their eyes met, McDermot burst out laughing.

"Yew think he won't be lookin' fer yew, eh?" he cried, with a strange twinkle in his eyes.

"Never mind," interposed the detective, who had learned to dread getting the fellow's tongue started. "You attend to your boat and I will attend to my affairs. I shall not detain you long."

"Oh, don't hurry yerself on my 'count," cried the other carelessly. "Only it mought be better tew hev me 'long in case—"

"In case of what?" interrupted the detective sharply.

"In case he mought be ready fer yew, an'—"

"What do you mean, sir?"

The fellow laughed coarsely.

"It ain't none o' my business," he muttered, half musingly, "but folks is sometimes fooled."

The detective looked at him sharply.

He did not like the fellow's actions.

There seemed to be something behind the grimaces, shrugs and coarse hints.

"I say," he finally demanded, "what do you know about this affair, anyway?"

The fellow shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Nothin' much," he snickered. "Grosvenor knows more'n me."

"What do you mean? That he knows that I am after his brother?"

Thad saw that he had betrayed himself as soon as he had spoken, but it was too late then, and the clown of a boatman roared.

"O' course yew ain't no detective!" he chuckled exasperatingly. "Oh, no. Pop was all wrong when he said so!"

Thad turned away in disgust. He would have no more to say to the wretch, who seemed to have the power of irritating him more and drawing him out in spite of himself with greater ease than the greatest diplomatist he had ever met. And it just now occurred to him that the fellow probably did not know as much as he

assumed to know about the matter, and that his sly hints to that effect were indulged in for the purpose of drawing the detective out and compelling him to reveal secrets which he was jealously guarding.

After leaving the boatman Thad strode off across the rocky island, pushing his way through thick bunches of huckleberry bushes and stumbling over stones, giving no heed to his own course, but keeping a sharp lookout for the men he was in pursuit of.

All of a sudden another thought occurred to him as he hurried along. Why had the men come ashore?

If they had come over to the island to fish, they could have no business on land.

There appeared to be but one solution of the mystery, and that was the one hinted at by McDermot: they knew that the detective was in pursuit of them.

And how could they have known it?

Thad now recalled the fact of meeting the old man that morning down by the beach. There was no doubt about it, he had been to Grosvenor's house to inform him of the presence of the detective in the town and put him on his guard. That was why they had left so early in the morning, and the reason they had come upon the island.

While musing thus, still keeping up his vigilance, he suddenly saw three heads dodge behind a rock at some distance away and disappear.

He did not see enough of them to be able to identify them, but he was convinced that it was the party he was after.

It was not likely that anybody else would be on the island on such a day.

The detective started in rapid pursuit.

Realizing that he was likely to meet with a warm reception, he prepared for the worst by putting his revolver into his side pocket and keeping his hand upon it.

A nearer approach showed him that the rock behind which the fugitives had dodged was almost perpendicular and formed an excellent natural fortress.

He at once recognized the danger he was facing in advancing upon such an ambush, and a less impetuous man would have shrunk from such an attack.

But the detective had but one thought in view, and that was that this fellow had escaped him on two previous occasions, and he was determined to capture him this time if it cost him his life.

And so he pushed on.

When within easy gun-shot of the rock he saw that he could approach it with comparative safety by keeping certain uprising perpendicular rocks between him and the one behind which the enemy were ambushed.

This he did, although he was compelled to creep on his hands and knees to accomplish it.

His progress was naturally slow and tedious and the steadily falling rain rendered the task anything but pleasant.

At length he reached the last rock which formed a shelter between him and the final ambush.

This was but a few yards from the latter, and when Thad reached it he paused to listen. No sound came from behind the rock, and he naturally concluded that the enemy were on the alert.

And then the detective noticed for the first time since he had been stealing upon the fortress that it was on the very brink of the water, if not overhanging it, as it appeared to be.

Thad was puzzled. For if the rock overhung the sea as it seemed from his point of view, where had the men gone?

There was but one way to find out, and that was to reach the rock itself. But to do that, would entail the greatest hazard of anything he had yet undergone.

The distance was no more than a hundred feet, but in covering that distance he exposed himself to the open fire of the enemy, provided they were in ambush for him.

Perhaps if he had stopped to consider the danger, he might have hesitated, but he did not.

He simply measured the distance with his eye and calculated the time it would take him to dash across it at good speed, and then, grasping his revolver firmly, suddenly left the rock and made the dash.

So rapid was his progress that the marksman must have been a good one to have picked him off as he flew, and he reached the rock without so much as smelling powder.

And still his greatest peril was before him.

He was behind the rock—or rather on one side of it, while the foe was concealed on the other.

The peril lay in reaching the other side without putting himself at the mercies of the enemy.

For once in his life the full realization of his situation flashed upon him with all the vivid details of its horrible possibilities.

But he did not allow himself to reflect upon it long.

He knew that fear was a matter of imagination, and he had never shrunken from peril in his life, so shutting the very thought and image of fear out of his heart, he at once began the operation of stealing around the rock.

In spite of his habitual coolness his excitement was intense.

The time required for making the angle of the rock could not have been more than two or three minutes at most, but it appeared like ages to the detective, who expected to encounter a foe at every step.

But he did not. In fact, he completed the angle without meeting with any opposition whatever, and then he had a view of the opposite side of the rock.

There was nobody there.

As it had appeared from a distance, the rock actually overhung the sea, but there was a narrow trail, not more than a foot wide, that ran along the abrupt side of the cliff like a gallery.

Where the trail terminated could not be determined, as the cliff made a curve in such a manner as to obscure the terminus.

Thad looked in every direction for the fugitives. They were nowhere to be seen, and there was no boat in sight, so they must have gone along the trail.

What was to be done?

To follow this path, which in itself was so narrow as to be extremely dangerous to follow without falling off, and so near the water that an inch rise of the tide would inundate it, was even more hazardous than the approach to the rock had seemed to be, for the fugitives were doubtless stationed somewhere further along, and the moment he turned the angle of the rock so as to come in view of them, they could easily pick him off.

At one time he thought of returning to the boat and having McDermot row him around and approach the enemy in that way, but upon second thought he realized that he would be more exposed from the seaside than he was from the footway, besides the men would not be as apt to anticipate him this way as the other.

Thad's mind was made up, and he descended the steep, slippery rock and started along the narrow footway.

His progress was extremely slow owing to the narrowness of the path and the slipperiness of the rocks, besides the rising tide was already dashing over some places where the path dipped particularly low, but by dint of clinging to the perpendicular wall and taking extra caution in the selection of his steps, he managed to creep along, and in the course of half an hour's tiresome work succeeded in turning the angle of the rock which had shut out the view of the terminus of the path.

He now saw that he had more than a hundred feet further to go, that the path was narrower if anything than the portion he had already traversed, that it was for the most part under water, and that it appeared to terminate in a sort of shelf which was sheltered by the overhanging rock, forming a snug retreat. But what he did not see were the men of whom he was in pursuit.

This led him to believe that the shelf was in reality the mouth of a cavern into which they had gone.

Thad reflected for some moments upon the advisability of proceeding, and was nearly on the point of abandoning the idea at one time, especially when he glanced back at the track, over which he had come and saw that it was now nearly all covered with water, but he could not reconcile his conscience to having to admit a failure, and then when he looked ahead and saw that the shelf was several feet above the water, he decided to go on.

And he pressed on.

Nearly another half-hour was consumed in making the remaining hundred feet, and the detective was pretty well exhausted as well as wet to the skin, when he finally put foot upon the shelving rock.

It was dry here, and Thad paused for some moments and sat down upon a small shelf that jutted out from the wall, forming an excellent seat to rest.

Meanwhile he looked about him in quest of the fugitives, as well as to survey his surroundings.

As he had expected, the indentation in the rock extended considerable distance back into the cliff, forming a sort of cavern, but what puzzled him was, where had the men gone? The cave was not so deep as to render it very dark and he could see every portion of it, apparently, from where he sat.

After he had rested a little while, the detective arose and walked back into the cavern to explore it.

It appeared to be as he had supposed, entirely unoccupied except by himself.

The place was not more than fifty feet deep and nearly as wide, so that it did not take him very long to explore the whole of it, after which he returned to the opening, with a view to making his way back to the top of the bank again.

But while he was surveying the path which he should have to pass over, and which was now covered by water, the sound of footsteps somewhere in the interior of the cave caused him to start.

There was a small recess near where he stood, and he lost no time in gliding into it and concealing himself from the approaching

persons whoever they might be (he could already distinguish more than one footstep), and listened.

The parties were not conversing, so that he could form no notion of their character, but he had not long to wait before they appeared on the shelf so close to him that had they looked in his direction they could not have avoided seeing him.

They were all dressed in tarpaulins like sailors or fishermen, so that he could not recognize them without seeing their faces, which were averted, but he saw that two of them were men and one a boy.

The men looked out upon the sea and made some comment upon the weather, but the strange thing about it was that, while there appeared to be no way from them to escape from the shelf-rock, they evinced no concern in the matter.

And just then they all turned their faces simultaneously toward Thad and he recognized one of them as Edward McDermot!

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE HANDS OF FATE.

At the same instant at which Thad caught a glimpse of the two men's faces they saw him, and the recognition was mutual.

But the surprise was all on one side.

Having expected to meet them at any minute for the past hour and a half, the detective was not surprised when he did, although he was at a loss somewhat to understand how they had got there; but the expression of astonishment in the men's faces, showed beyond all question that they were completely taken by surprise—that they were not aware that he was anywhere near them, and appeared utterly unable to understand how he had discovered their hiding-place.

They stared at each other for some seconds, and neither Grosvenor nor McDermot made any move, either to attack the detective or to escape, and neither showed any inclination to speak.

And then Thad stepped boldly forward and said:

"Edward McDermot, I hold a warrant for your arrest."

To Thad's surprise, instead of offering any resistance, as he expected he would, McDermot turned pale and became greatly agitated. He dropped his head like a man who has yielded to superior force.

But what astonished the detective most was his brother's conduct.

From what Thad had heard, he had no other thought than that McDermot's brother, no less than himself, was expecting the detective, and that he would be ready to resist him and defend his brother with his own life.

Instead of that, when the detective pronounced the words, Grosvenor looked inquiringly at his brother, and as the latter dropped his eyes under the gaze, he turned to the detective for an explanation.

"What is he arrested for?" he asked with a troubled brow.

The frank, open countenance impressed Thad at once that the man was as honest and simple-minded as his brother was cunning and wicked, and it was with a qualm that he responded to his simple inquiry:

"Murder."

"Murder?"

And the man turned a scared and horrified face upon his brother again.

Still McDermot did not, could not raise his eyes from the ground where they had remained ever since Thad had uttered the fatal words.

A long silence ensued, disturbed only by the murmuring waves at their feet and the hard breathing of the two brothers.

Finally Grosvenor asked in an almost inaudible whisper:

"Edward, is this true?"

The other shrunk and cringed under the combined gaze and inquiry of his brother.

"Tell me, brother!" repeated the other, in a beseeching tone, "is it true? Have you been guilty of this?"

McDermot was still silent and a struggle seemed to be going on within him.

At length he appeared to gain the mastery of his feelings, raised his eyes to his brother's face and answered in a clear voice:

"No!"

An expression of mingled relief and triumph beamed in Grosvenor's face when it turned toward Thad an instant later.

"I knew it was not true!" he cried, with a deep sigh and a smile of triumph. "How dare you come here with such an accusation?"

"Because I have convincing evidence of its truth and I come with the authority vested in me as a detective," was Thad's reply.

"But my brother says it is not true."

"That goes for nothing. What criminal will not deny his guilt, if he imagines that he can thereby escape punishment?"

"My brother is neither a criminal, nor the man to deny a thing if he had been guilty of it!" retorted the other, growing excited.

"This is because you love him better than you know him. You do not suppose I would take

the risk of coming away out here to arrest him if the evidence did not warrant it, do you?"

"I do not know what you would do. I only know that my brother is innocent—"

"How do you know this?" interrupted Thad impatiently.

"Because he says so, and because I know him to be incapable of what you charge against him!"

"And I know more positively that he is guilty of at least one, and perhaps two murders, and must do my duty as an officer of the law, and arrest him. If he is an innocent man he will have no objection to an investigation. Come, sir," he went on, addressing McDermot, "you must come with me."

As Thad completed the sentence, he advanced a step toward the culprit, and the latter quickly drew back.

Thad was about to advance upon him again, when the brother, who was a perfect giant in size and strength, stepped in between them.

"No," he growled, glaring savagely at the detective, "you sha'n't do it!"

"Are you an honest man?" demanded Thad, taking the matter coolly.

"Yes, but—"

"Then you will not stand in the way of justice, even in defense of your own brother?"

"Yes, I will, so long as that brother asserts his innocence. If he is willing to go along, all well and good. I have nothing to say. But when he says he is innocent and asks me to defend him against a hired minion of the law, whose authority is probably based upon some malicious enemy's false representation, I will do it with my life!"

There was an earnestness and honesty about this declaration that brooked no questioning. It was clear that he meant every word that he said, and would carry out his threat.

Thad was a trifle upset.

If he had had a real criminal to deal with or a mere braggart, he would have known exactly how to proceed, but it is hard to face the batteries of an honest bigot.

Still, Thad was not the man to allow sentiment to swerve him from duty for long, and pulling himself together and assuming a sternness that he did not feel, he retorted:

"Well, sir, in spite of your feelings in the matter, I must take this man, with or without his consent and yours. In the name of the law, I demand that you do not interfere, and if you do, you must suffer the consequences. You must be treated as a criminal just the same as he. Stand aside!"

Instad of doing as commanded, however, the burly fellow planked himself more firmly and stubbornly before him than before, and, while he did not utter a word, he ground his teeth and glowered in a manner that showed he was ready for any emergency.

The fellow was evidently totally unarmed, and Thad knew that he could have shot him down with the greatest ease, and this fact, no less than the man's fearlessness and devotion to his brother, caused Thad to hesitate for an instant.

But it was only for an instant.

He felt that the longer he delayed matters the worse it would be, and determined to bring them to a climax at once.

He had no intention of killing the fellow, but he knew that it would be necessary to intimidate him.

He therefore drew his pistol, and leveling it at the giant, said, in cool, deliberate tones:

"I must do my duty! If you do not get out of the way, I shall have to shoot you!"

But the brave fellow did not quail.

Not even a muscle of his face changed.

He threw himself back, expanded his great chest, and said, in a calm, dispassionate voice:

"Shoot! I am unarmed, as you see. I have only the weapons that God gave me, and I am ready to meet any man who uses no other! But you are armed and can shoot me like a dog! Do it, if you dare! It is the only way that you will ever come at my brother!"

Thad realized that it would never do to weaken now, so, instead of multiplying words, he cocked his revolver.

It was very still. The dead calm was only disturbed by the soft swish of the ripples as they washed against the rocks, and the hard breathing of the giant, who, with distended nostrils, stood glaring at the detective, apparently calmly awaiting death.

It was a dreadful ordeal for Thad.

He had never experienced anything like it.

How could he steel his heart sufficiently to kill this brave, defenseless man? And yet his duty stared him in the face!

Half a dozen seconds passed.

His mind was made up.

Cruel, horrible as it was, cowardly as it seemed to kill an unarmed man, it must be done!

Banishing every feeling of sentiment and sympathy from his heart, pressing forward and riveting his opponent with his terrible eyes, he prepared for his awful duty.

His eyes burned with the fire of a tiger's, and his usually gentle face had become hard and rigid, the lines drawn and inflexible as cords of iron.

To a man with less heroism than the one before him the detective's aspect must have been terrific.

But the latter did not cringe or waver.

He stood like a statue of stone, with his arms folded across his great chest, calmly contemplating his would-be slayer, the embodiment of heroism and defiance.

The time had come.

The deed could be deferred no longer.

Thad pressed the trigger, and a deafening crash filled the cavern and echoed back into the bowels of the hollow rock, and a whiff of blue smoke shut out the vision of the antagonists one from the other for a brief moment, and then drifted slowly away in the sluggish breeze, but no blood had been spilled.

Rapid as had been Thad's action, short as had been the space from the time he had made up his mind what to do to the carrying out of the same, the action of another had been still more rapid.

So intent upon his purpose had been the detective that he had forgotten the very existence of McDermot, and that individual had taken advantage of the fact to glide noiselessly and unobserved around to the side of his brother, and at the very instant that Thad pulled the trigger, he clutched the weapon and turned it to one side so that the charge crashed harmlessly into the insensate rocks.

Nor did he relax his clutch upon the weapon when this was accomplished.

Taking advantage of the detective's surprise and want of preparation, he wrenched the pistol from the detective's hand, and before the latter had time to draw another or throw himself into an attitude of self-defense, clutched him firmly by the throat.

Thad was not long in this position, however, for with one mighty effort he wrenched his self free, but at that very instant the other man sprang at him from behind and pinioned his hands.

He now had an opportunity of judging of the powerful giant's strength, for in spite of his most heroic efforts, the fellow held him as though he had been a child.

He soon saw that it was folly to struggle; and resigned himself to his fate.

The big man laughed softly.

"Things have taken a turn," he muttered.

"Now see if you have the nerve that I had."

Thad was far from cheerful at the situation, but he was too brave a man to allow an enemy to know that he felt any alarm, and determined to put the best face upon matters.

"Every dog has his day," he smiled. "I had mine awhile ago, and now you have yours."

"That's right," observed the other. "And as you tried your best to kill me when you had me at a disadvantage, you will not grumble now that we have the advantage, if we carry out your scheme upon yourself, I suppose?"

"I am in your power. Do what you please with me. Only, remember that what I was about to do was in the discharge of my duty, while your action will only be a revenge and can be characterized as nothing but cold-blooded murder!"

The words startled the big man.

It served to cool his passion instantly.

The thought of murder was abhorrent to him, and now that the true nature of his intended action was explained to him in all the coolness of Thad's philosophy, the thought caused him to waver in his design.

He bestowed that inquiring look upon his brother which appeared to be habitual with him in case of extremity, and the other scowled and shook his head.

"I see no reason why we should spare him," growled McDermot. "Especially as he tried to kill you, and would probably have dispatched both of us if I had not disarmed him just as I did."

"But—but—it will be murder!" faltered the big man.

McDermot laughed a hollow, heartless laugh.

"It will not be much of a murder to kill a policeman," he said. "Besides, it will be in self-defense."

Oh, how vividly did Thad recall these very words uttered by this man two nights before in his own house, when he was urging the secretary to kill the butler.

"I—I don't see how we can call it self-defense," stammered the brother, whose determination was evidently growing momentarily weaker. "He is powerless now."

"So were you powerless a moment ago," retorted McDermot, who was fast losing his patience and temper. "All the same, he was bound to kill you, and would have done so but for my interference."

The big fellow was silent.

"I don't like to have any part in it," he finally murmured. "If he had his arms, or was attacking me with his fists, I could do it with a good grace, but—"

"Fool!" interrupted the other. "Were you armed, or had you attacked him with your fists, when he attempted to blow your head off?"

"No. And yet—"

"Well, why should we show him any mercy?"

The big man was again silent, and Thad could

hear his heavy breathing and feel that a terrible struggle was going on within him.

Finally he nerved himself as for a heroic effort, cleared his throat and said:

"No, Edward, you can do what you like, but it shall never be said that I took the life of a defenseless man, even if he did try to take mine in a cowardly manner!"

Oh, how heartily Thad wished at that moment that he could recall or undo his action of a moment ago! Not because it had jeopardized his life, but because it had brought him into the contempt of this brave, honest man!

Meanwhile McDermot had grown calm, realizing, probably, that his temper only served to crystallize his brother's determination, and, after a little reflection, returned to the subject in a quiet, dispassionate tone.

"Well, it shall be as you say, John," he observed, calmly. "We won't kill him. But you certainly won't ask me to let him go so that he can not only attack us again, but try to arrest me for a crime which I never committed?"

"N—no, I could hardly do that," mused the brother. "But—"

"I have it."

"Well?"

"I have a cord here, and we will tie him hand and foot, and then we'll—"

"What?" gasped the brother.

"Leave him here," was the heartless response.

"To drown? Never! That would be as much murder as if we shot him. The tide will cover this place in another hour, and he would be a dead man."

"Oh, well, we'll leave him here until we can bring a boat after him, when we will take him to high ground and leave him."

"That will do. I agree to that," acquiesced the brother.

They then bound the detective hand and foot, and disappeared into the cave, and when the tide rose till the water swept over him, the men had still not returned!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GENEROUS FOE.

STILL the tide rose, and still no sign of the reappearance of the detective's deliverers.

First the waves dashed upon the edge of the rock and crawled along on the shelf toward where he lay in a thin frothy sheet, and just touching him.

The detective rolled over and over until he had reached the mouth of the cavern, and felt secure in the thought that the tide must rise several inches to reach him there.

But anon it crawled up higher and lashed his sides.

And then he rolled over several times more and reached the middle of the cave, and as this was several inches higher than the shelf, he hoped against hope that the tide would not reach him there before the men's return.

And then he began to wonder if it could be possible that McDermot had been able to persuade his brother not to return, and that he was to be left there to die.

It began to truly look like it, and yet he could scarcely credit his own suspicion that such a thing could be.

Meanwhile the water continued to rise and to crawl along the floor of the cave, first in narrow ribbons in the lowest places, and soon in broader sheets that widened momentarily, and soon began to weld themselves together in lakes. And it ran to the uttermost wall of the cave and began slowly creeping up that and dashing back toward the portal again, each time growing stronger and stronger in volume, and deepening on the rocky floor.

And now the water began to rise higher and higher on the prostrate man's sides, saturating his clothing with its brine and chilling his blood with its icy waves.

Thad began to grow seriously alarmed.

There appeared no longer to be any hope of deliverance.

They had already delayed fully an hour longer than was necessary to fetch the boat, it was hardly likely that they would come now.

Despair began to seize him.

He already had to hold his head as far aloft as possible to keep his mouth above the surging waves, and a few minutes more would suffice to cover him entirely.

In vain he had tried to get upon his feet.

He could not even sit upright, as they had tied the cord in such a manner as to keep him in an elongated position.

But there was one hope.

He had not tried to break the cord which they had placed around his neck, carried down his back and fastened around his waist.

This now occurred to him, and he made an attempt to break it.

At first it would not yield, and what was worse, now that it was soaked in water, it began to shrink and shorten, thus drawing his head further back.

Again the detective tugged at the cord, and was delighted to feel that it was yielding a trifle under his powerful strength.

Thus stimulated, he threw all his strength into

one heroic effort, and was rewarded by hearing a sharp crack and to feel that the cord had been severed.

This had occurred none too soon, for already the waves were running over his face and he had to keep his mouth closed lest the bitter brine should be drawn into his mouth.

But now he sat upright, and felt a relief to know that several hours more must elapse before the waters could rise above his head.

Still he was little better off than before.

The icy flood was chilling his very marrow, and when he glanced around at the marks which former tides had left upon the walls, he saw that sooner or later it would rise so as to fill the cavern and engulf him, even though he were standing upon his feet.

Then it struck Thad that, as he had been able to break the cord around his neck, possibly he could sever the ones around his feet and wrists.

He made an effort in this direction. In fact, he tugged and wrenched till his wrists and ankles were raw, but it was no use. The cord was several strands strong, and would not yield, and he finally gave up in despair.

And then another idea came to him.

Possibly he could get upon his feet, if he could only reach the wall to crawl up by, and so he crawled to the nearest wall and tried, but he soon found that the idea was impracticable, from the fact that the wall was so slippery that he could get no hold upon it, and he relinquished that scheme.

It appeared now that there was nothing to do but await the slow but sure approach of death by drowning.

That it was to come sooner or later he no longer had any doubt. The hope of deliverance had long since vanished, and he had resigned himself to fate.

Now, too, when it was too late, he began to see his folly in following the men to the island, instead of awaiting their return to the hut, and concluded that the young fisherman, whom he had thought so simple, was wiser than himself, and wished in his heart that he had listened to the fellow's counsel.

In the mean time the tide kept on rising.

Hour after hour dragged by, and the water rose higher.

At length daylight began to fade, and the already somber cave was rapidly falling into deep gloom.

And now the water had risen until it was around his neck, and the waves, which had grown stronger under a wind that had blown up, lashed up into his face.

The gloom deepened, and at length it grew so dark that no object could be seen.

The sullen waves dashed around with a monotonous, hungry roar as if impatient to swallow him up and take him for its own.

Thad fully believed that his time had come, and, uttering a prayer, closed his eyes to his fate.

He was in such agony from the cold and the smarting salt that he only wished for death to put an end to his misery.

Once or twice he had even contemplated lying down and making an end of it, but even with all his agony life was sweet, and he clung to it, and clutched at the last straw of hope that floated by.

And just then he heard something that sounded differently from the plash and roar of the waves.

He listened and heard it again.

It was very like the sound of oars working in rowlocks.

At first he thought it might be imagination, and he strained his ears.

It must have been imagination, for he could no longer hear it.

Still, he listened, and now it broke upon his ears again, closer and more distinctly than before.

He could not be mistaken this time, but as he listened the sound ceased once more, and with it his heart ceased to beat.

He could barely keep his mouth above the waves now by stretching his neck to its utmost, but he still hoped and bent his ear to catch the slightest sound which resembled an oar.

It did not come, but something else did.

As he listened he heard the sound of a human voice.

"Detective!" came the words, and he realized that the speaker was but a few feet away from him.

"Here!" he answered with all the energy left him.

"Ah!"

And then he heard the oars moving again, and knew why they had ceased before.

The unknown boatman had been listening like himself.

Now came the voice again:

"Where are you?"

"Here!" was the chattering response, for Thad was shivering so that he could scarcely speak.

"Good!" came the cheery voice again.

And the next instant he felt the prow of the boat brush past him, and an instant later a strong hand grasped him by the shoulder.

"Can you help yourself, or shall I get out

and lift you in?" was the next question from the boatman.

"I'm pretty near helpless," replied Thad. "If these cords were off my wrists and ankles—"

"True," said the other, and without another word sprung out into the water, took the detective under the arms and lifted him into the boat as though he had been a child.

Then he knew who his deliverer was. Nobody could have done that but Grosvenor.

The latter then entered the boat himself, and, taking up the oars, soon put the boat outside of the cave, and when clear of the rocks began to pull with a regular and powerful stroke that sent the little craft spinning through the water.

No words passed between them.

Thad was too much chilled to talk, and the other was apparently too deeply engrossed in the business of rowing to enter into conversation.

For some time Thad did not know where the man was rowing him to, and did not care much. He felt that he could not be in any worse place than he had already been in, and was perfectly indifferent as to his present destination.

Finally, however, he began to discern the lights of the town and knew that he was being taken back to New Rochelle.

Only once during the trip did the stalwart boatman break the uniform silence which he had preserved from the time he had lifted Thad into the boat. That was when they were within a few hundred yards of the shore. He turned in his seat at the oars and looked back at Thad who was in the stern of the boat.

Seeing the detective drawn up in a bunch, and shivering as he had never done before in his life, the big boatman remarked:

"You're a bit cold, I reckon, sir?"

"Ye—yes," shivered the detective, scarcely able to articulate.

"Never mind. We'll soon be there now, and the old woman will have something warm and strong for us, I'll warrant."

Thad made no reply. The prospect of the warm drink and a warm fire was cheering, but what he was thinking of more than either was the fact that the big man had returned alone to rescue him from the watery grave, and having done so, he was wondering why he had allowed the cords to remain upon his limbs.

Another thing puzzling the detective was, what had become of the big man's brother. Also, what the big man calculated to do with him when he got back to the town.

That he had any intention to set him at liberty never entered Thad's mind. If such had been the big man's intention, he certainly would have removed the bonds from his wrists and ankles before leaving the island.

Incidentally Thad thought of the young boatman who had rowed him over to the island, and wondered what had become of him, and what the young man would think had become of the detective.

By this time the boat had touched the land and the big man sprung ashore, beached his boat, and held on to the painter-line, waiting for the detective to follow him.

Finally losing patience, he asked:

"Coming out, sir?"

"I'll have to ask you to help me," rejoined Thad, "unless you remove the cords from my legs."

"Merciful Moses!" ejaculated the big man. "I had forgotten all about them. I should have removed them before we left the island. It's a shame, but you must forgive me. I was somewhat excited."

Thad made no reply, and without more ado the big man stepped back into the boat, fumbled about in the dark until he found the cords, and then severed them with his knife.

This he did to both the cords on the detective's wrists and on his ankles.

Even when the cords were removed, he found it difficult to stand for some seconds, much less walk, so stiff were his limbs from their long confinement, but with the assistance of his kind-hearted deliverer, he finally made out to walk up the beach to the hut.

It was probably fortunate that the big man's wife was out at the moment they entered the hut, or Thad might have found some difficulty in getting in. As it was, however, he had got seated beside a great roaring fire and was comfortably toasting his shins when she returned.

The old woman eyed him curiously for some seconds, and finally cried in her screechy voice:

"Wal, bless my soul an' buddy! Ef that man hed whiskers, I'd be willin' tew swear thet it waz the old farmer thet waz a-bangin' rearound hair this mornin'!"

Thad instinctively put his hand to his chin, and sure enough, his chin-whiskers were gone. The water had softened the cement which had held them in place, and in his agony the detective had not noticed that they had floated off.

For some reason, the big man had not noticed the loss either, although he had noticed a change in the appearance of Thad's face, but he understood what was the matter, and, looking at the detective, winked.

He then observed:

"Sally, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Jones.

He met with a little accident—fell into the water over at the island, and I brought him over. We can find a place for him to sleep to-night, I reckon."

"No, we can't do nothin' o' the kind!" she snapped. "Yew're 'tarnally fetchin' some beggar biar fer me tew work an' slave fer, an' mender yew nuther never git no thanks fer it, much less anything else!"

"But, Sally," protested the big fisherman, "this man is no beggar. I warrant you he has more money than we ever saw."

"Let 'im go tew a tavern, then. We ain't got no place to 'commodate big folks no more then beggars!"

Thad saw that the dispute was likely to assume unpleasant proportions if he did not put an end to it, so he interposed:

"My dear madam, and Mr. Grosvenor, as you have intimated, I have plenty of money, and would not think of troubling you for the world. I only wish to dry my clothing a little so that I can present myself at the hotel, when I will go there at once. And I shall not only be more than grateful to you for the kindness you have shown me, but I shall insist upon paying you for all the trouble you have been to."

"No you won't pay us a cent!" retorted Grosvenor, with a hurt tone of voice. "Nobody shall ever say that John Grosvenor charged a man for warming himself by his fire!"

"But you saved—"

But the big man silenced him with a warning frown and a shake of the head.

"I owe you for rowing me over from the island," corrected Thad, as though he had never been interrupted, "thereby saving me the pain of staying there all night."

The big man grinned at what he evidently considered a brilliant turn which the detective had given the sentence.

The mention of money warmed the woman's heart somewhat, and she went to work about making a hot punch, which she soon had ready and gave Thad, at the same time she was not satisfied until she had had her say out, and kept on mumbling.

"There's that brother, or half-brother of yours, John. He's a nice one!" she growled. "He comes biar an' stays fer a week to a stretch, hez me waitin' on him as if he waz a infant, an' goes away and never sez boo. He come back from the island this evenin' wet an' hungry, an' sed he mus' hev suthin' quick, ez he hed toew light out. He's allus a-comin' an' a-lightin', an' I don't b'lieve he's no better'n he'd ought tew be, or he'd stay hum with his woman an' behave hisself."

While the woman was talking the big man kept his eye upon the detective, winked and grinned occasionally, but never spoke, and then he happened to turn so that the light fell upon his face, and Thad was surprised to see that it was cut in several places and that his eye was black, besides the front of his shirt was stained with blood. He made no comment upon it, however, but wondered what had occurred to him.

At length Thad found himself sufficiently dry to venture to the hotel, and proposed going, but the woman would not hear to it until he had shared the humble but substantial supper.

Then he went, and at his invitation the big man walked over with him.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE, SAD STORY.

THE big man walked as far as the hotel with Thad and they talked about various things, but never touched upon the events of the day.

The detective was anxious to question him upon certain things, especially in regard to the present whereabouts of his brother.

The latter was a delicate subject, and it required a good deal of courage to approach it.

Thad did not half-believe that the big man would give him any satisfaction, but he determined to pump him at the first opportunity.

It could not be very well done in the street, so, when they reached the hotel Thad invited him up into his room.

To his surprise the fellow accepted the invitation at once, even evincing an anxiety to go.

When they reached the room and Thad had handed the big man a chair he started to strike a light.

"What's the use?" protested the fisherman. "Unless you want it. I always rather sit in the dark when I want to talk earnest."

"Very well," responded the detective. "I am not particular about the light. However, we can smoke," he went on, handing the big man a cigar and a match, and then taking one himself and lighting it.

"Thanks," said the fisherman, and then lapsed into silence and devoted himself to lighting his cigar.

Wishing to bring about the topic uppermost in his mind as soon as possible, Thad commenced:

"First of all, I want to ask your pardon for my actions on the island to-day, and to thank you for your noble treatment of me after I fell into your power. Of course, you understand, it was in the performance of duty that I did it, and it is not the first time in my career as a detective that I have been com-

pelled to perform a bitter task, one that wrung my very heart, in order to comply with that inexorable law called duty. But to think that after what had happened or nearly happened, you should have been so good and generous as to—"

"Let us not speak of that now," interrupted the big man, with an impatient gesture which the detective could see because the other was between him and the window through which the moon was now shining. "I understand what you are called upon to do, sir, and it must be unpleasant to a man like you, for I can see that you are no common man. Excuse me, sir, but I like you."

"Thank you," interposed Thad. "And I not only like you, but I admire you immeasurably. Your conduct—"

Again the fisherman silenced him with his impatient gesture.

"You cannot blame me for defending my brother, or half-brother, rather," he went on, "although he will never be the man to thank me for it, even if I had lost my life in doing it. Indeed, his only reason for stepping in between me and death was because he had further use for me. He knew that if I was killed his own case would have been desperate. You would have taken him, as he probably deserved to be."

"I not only do not blame you for your interference, Mr. Grosvenor, but I admire you for it. There are many brothers—"

"What I was about to say," interposed the big man, with his inevitable gesture, "is that he will never thank me for taking his part. I did not know whether he was guilty of the charge you laid against him or not. I did not stop to think then. He asserted his innocence and I took his word in preference to yours because he is my brother while you are a stranger. I was determined that you should not be killed, even though you had attempted my life."

"For which I am very sorry," put in Thad in spite of his gesture.

"It was my intention when we left you," pursued the big man, "to return with the boat at once, and before the water came up on you. Anticipating my design, however, he hurried to the boat, jumped in and attempted to push her off. I knew what his motive was, and ran for the boat and succeeded in getting hold of the painter, although I had to wade half waist-deep to catch it. Then I began dragging the boat ashore again, and had her nose on the beach, when he rushed upon me with an oar. 'Drop that line!' he cried. 'Never!' I replied. 'You want to murder that poor devil!' says I. 'That is nothing to you,' he growled. 'Drop that line, or I'll brain you!' Of course, I did not drop the painter. I never obeyed a man who spoke to me like that in my life, and I wasn't going to do it then."

"As a matter of fact, I didn't believe he had courage enough to strike me, but I misjudged him. He was as good as his word, and the next thing I knew, down came the oar crashing upon my head."

"It knocked me down and stunned me for an instant, but I was soon upon my feet again, and grabbed the oar. With that he let go the oar and snatched up the other. He knew that I would not strike him and had me at his mercy."

"Well, he used his oar to such advantage that he succeeded in knocking me senseless and left me lying. When I came to he was gone with the boat and my boy."

"I didn't know what to do. There I was on the island alone, with no boat, and with the knowledge of you being slowly swallowed up by the sea. And to make matters worse, it was growing dark."

"Pardon me," interrupted Thad at this point, "but how did you get out of the cave? That has been puzzling me all along. Inasmuch as you got out without a boat, how is it that you could not get back?"

"I will explain that point. There is a passage at the rear of the cave which is in the form of a tunnel, not more than two feet high. We passed out that way, by crawling upon our all-fours. But you will remember that by dark the tide had risen about two feet above the floor of the cave. I went back to the tunnel, which is about two hundred feet long, as soon as I recovered consciousness, only to find that it was full of water. No man could crawl that distance through sea-water without being suffocated. If it had been deep enough for me to swim, I could have got into the cave, although I could have been of no use to you, as you could not have swum that distance under water in your chilled condition, and with your limbs numb from the bonds. Nevertheless I would have tried it, as I say, if the tunnel had been large enough for me to swim."

"Let me interrupt you once more," said the detective. "What were you doing in the cave?"

"I went in there to show it to Edward. That is, that was his excuse for wanting to go in there. I had told him about the place, and he expressed a desire to see it. I know now that his real motive was to dodge you."

"You did not enter it by way of the narrow path that runs along the edge of the cliff, then?"

"No. The tunnel goes into the side of the cliff just where the path starts, and curves like a horse-shoe. It is a much easier and safer way of getting into the cave, except at very low tide. You entered by way of the foot-path, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"We might have gone that way—I often do—but as parts of it were already under water, my brother was afraid to attempt it. But let me get back to my story."

"Yes, go on. I shall not interrupt you."

"As I was saying, I was at my wife's side when I came to and found my last gone, and did not know which way to turn. But finally I remembered that my boy had left a boat on the other side of the island last week—one that he found adrift. He was loaded down to the gun-wales with fish, and as the wind was high at the time, he was afraid to try to tow her in, and tied her up in a little cove on the other side of the island. I was not certain whether he had ever gone after her or not, but as luck favored me, he had not."

"It is strange that your boy did not return for you," interposed Thad again, in spite of his promise not to interrupt the narrator any more.

"It is strange. I don't understand it myself. But he may have been prevented by his uncle, and thought I would find the other boat, which I did, and came to your rescue."

"And none too soon," observed the detective.

"And none too soon," admitted the fisherman. "Well, you know the rest," he supplemented, and then lapsed into silence.

"You do not know what has become of him, of course?" said Thad, after a season of silence.

"No more than you do," rejoined the big man wearily. "You heard what my wife said about him going away in a great hurry?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know no more. I suppose, though, that he has gone back to the city. By the way, what is this about him committing a murder?"

"You are not thin-skinned regarding your brother, are you?" said the detective, by way of preface.

"Not a bit. If he has done anything wrong, cut with it, although I did defend him this afternoon."

Thad then related in detail the circumstances of the murder in the garden, and also mentioned the other murder of which he was suspected.

At its conclusion, the big man sighed and shook his head.

"I've feared for a long time that my brother was not living the right kind of a life," he said dolefully, "although he has always pretended to be the saint and held me up as the sinner, because I made one slip in early life."

Both men were silent for some moments, and then Thad said:

"I presume you do not care to relate what that slip was, and also something about the early history of yourself and brother, or half-brother, I believe you call him?"

"Would you care to hear it?" asked the fisherman eagerly.

"I should be delighted to hear it, if you don't mind," answered Thad in a kindly voice.

"It's rather long and a not overly interesting story," observed the big man, after a pause; "but if you care to hear it, I will tell it in my own way."

Then he was silent again for a long time and appeared to be collecting his thoughts.

At length he resumed:

"Our father (that is, his father and my step-father) was pretty well off and gave both of us a good education, but he always favored Edward and gave him all the money he wanted to spend, while I was compelled to scratch for myself from my youth, almost."

"While we were both young—I was about eighteen and he about sixteen—we went to the city and got situations in the same bank. As I say, he had plenty of money to spend, and became a high roller, as they call it, while I was compelled to keep away from the boys and from society on account of my poverty."

"Before he was twenty he had had a dozen escapades with women, and I was finally induced, partly through his persuasion and partly for the purpose of keeping an eye upon him (at the request of my father), to join him, and so got to running around a good deal. This soon consumed what little money I had saved and I became pinched."

"Edward had a particular fancy for actresses, and through him I became acquainted with what appeared to me an angel. She might not have been as handsome as I then imagined, but that is neither here nor there. She was all-in-all to me, and I squandered all the money I could earn or borrow upon her."

"This could have but one ending."

"The time came when I could not raise sufficient money by my own honest resources to do the right thing by this angel, and—I stole!"

"Yes, strange and horrible as it may seem to you, seeing me now, it is a fact that I became a regular and systematic thief, abstracting large and small sums of money from my em-

players from day to day. This naturally could not go on forever. A day soon came when my thefts were discovered. The evidence was so clear that I could not have denied my crime if I had wished. I confessed everything and was convicted and sent to State's Prison. Owing to my youth and good reputation I had previously borne, my term was but five years, but it was long enough to blight my life. I could not look my old associates in the face again, and so I came out here where I was not known, secured employment as a sailor and finally became a fisherman. In time I married the daughter of one of my fellow-watermen, a good, honest girl, but as you can understand, not a person to make a companion for a man who had had a college education and mingled in good society. Nevertheless, she made me a good wife—certainly as good as an ex-convict could hope for, and I cannot complain.

"As for the remainder of my life, there could not be anything more uneventful than it has been. I have simply lived the humdrum life you see me living now from day to day and year to year, always poor and struggling for mere existence, and never daring to hope for anything better."

The fisherman paused.

The recital of his own story had rendered him extremely melancholy, and he had either stopped because his feelings had overcome him or because he had finished his story.

Whatever the cause, his silence continued so long that the detective finally prompted him:

"Is that all?" inquired he.

"No?"

He had evidently been aroused from a profound reverie.

"I say have you finished your story?"

"Oh. Yes, yes. That is all."

And the poor fellow roused himself up and looked about in the gray light in a bewildered sort of way. At length he seemed to recollect where he was, and repeated:

"Yes, that is all. There is nothing more worth telling. Dull and uneventful enough, eh?"

"Sad enough, too," rejoined the detective. "But you have told me nothing about your brother. Excuse me for saying it, but his history will be of more interest to me now than your own. You say that he was more or less mixed up with actresses. Do you remember one named Lottie with whom he was somewhat fascinated?"

To Thad's surprise the fellow jumped to his feet at the mention of the name as though he had received an electric shock.

"Lottie? My God!"

And he did nothing for several moments but pace the floor in a half frantic mood.

At length, stopping in front of the detective, he said, in a stage whisper:

"Lottie! What do you know of her, sir?"

Thad was startled at the man's manner, which was little short of that of a maniac.

The detective contrived to control his feelings, however, and answered as coolly as possible:

"Very little. I only know that there is such a woman, and your brother was in some way mixed up with her."

"My brother mixed up with her? I, you mean! It was she who led me to spend more money than my resources warranted! It was she who drove me to commit a theft! My God! Have you seen her? I thought she was dead and in her grave long ago! Tell me, do you know anything about her?"

"Sit down and calm yourself," admonished the detective quietly, "and I will tell you all I know of her."

The fellow sank back mechanically into a seat.

"Now tell me—do tell me!" he gasped impatiently.

"So I will, very soon, but first tell me, did not your brother also aspire to this woman's hand?"

"Not that I know of," he answered breathlessly. "There was somebody that—but never mind. No, so far as I know, my brother never had anything to do with her. She accused me of wronging her. It was not true, but I could not prove my innocence, and it has cost me a great deal of money—all I could raise—to keep her from prosecuting me. My brother advanced the money long ago, and I have been all these years laboring to repay him, and still owe him more than I shall ever be able to repay."

"Did you have it from her own lips that she believed you had done her this wrong?"

"No. I have never seen her for years. But she told my brother, who told me."

"And you had no other evidence?"

"None. Was not that enough?"

"Assuredly not. He has simply used this as a means of extorting money from you. Depend upon it."

CHAPTER XX.

LOYAL TO THE LAST.

GROSVENER was so astonished at this unexpected revelation that he was unable to speak for some moments.

He sat like one who had received a heavy blow, wildly staring, or striving to stare, at the detective through the gloom.

Finally he made out to gasp:

"Can this be true?"

"I have not the least doubt of it," Thad responded. "From what I have seen of the man—if he is your brother—I should say that it was entirely in keeping with his character."

Thad then went on to relate what had passed between the woman and the man whom she called Edward, and whom he believed to be none other than McDermot, in the room at Hell's Kitchen.

At its conclusion, the fellow drew a deep breath.

"Is it possible," he murmured at length, "that I have been the victim of his villainy all these years?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it."

The fellow was silent for a long time.

"If this is true," he murmured finally, "it will account for a good deal which has been vague and mysterious to me all along. It will account for the fact that he would never hear of me going to town on any pretext, and also for the fact that he was always getting into trouble and having to come out and hide himself in my humble and out-of-the-way home."

"Did you not know that the woman was married to a man named Jerold Maher?" demanded the detective.

"Never," was the quick reply.

"And that she had had a child by him?"

"I knew—through my brother—that she had had a child, but was led to believe that she claimed it was mine."

"Which you know was untrue?"

"I knew that it was not mine, but was given to understand by my brother that she had sworn it was and that she had a dozen witnesses to back her up. As I was an ex-convict, I was well aware that nobody would believe me, and fully expected to be sent over the road again. I may say right here that I received a letter purporting to come from her, threatening to prosecute me unless I paid her an enormous sum of money. I now believe, after what you have told me, that my brother wrote the letter."

"There is no doubt of it. Did you ever hear that your brother abducted the child?"

"No. I heard that it had been abducted, and that the suspicion was that I had done it, and it cost me a great deal more money to get out of that."

"What an unconscionable scoundrel he is!" cried the detective, with a shudder, "and how brutally he has wronged you! Why, the suspicion never lay against you, but him. He was the one suspected, and the one who was undoubtedly guilty. The child was taken to his house by the woman herself and he promised to take care of it. But instead of that, he spirited it away, and, it is believed by those acquainted with the circumstances, killed it or had it killed."

"Horrible!"

"You may well say so. And now tell me what has become of your father, or step-father rather?"

The fellow started perceptibly.

For several minutes he made no reply.

Finally he answered in a half-scared, half-depressed voice:

"I would rather not speak about that. It is a matter that is very painful to me, and can be of no use to you."

"At least, you can tell me whether he is still alive or not?"

Again he hesitated, but finally murmured faintly:

"Yes, he is still alive."

"But you have no communication with him?"

"No."

"Did you ever bear his name?"

"Yes, until after I got into trouble, and then, at his earnest request, I dropped his name and took my own."

"And you became as strangers from that on."

"Yes."

"You sometimes see him, I suppose?"

"Yes, often."

"Does he still affiliate with Edward?"

"That I cannot say. My brother and I agreed long ago never to mention my father in any way, and hence I do not know whether they are on good terms or not, although I have no reason to doubt that they are. I know of no reason why they should not be. My step-father always liked Edward better than any of his other sons and treated him as a favorite ever since I can recollect."

"How many other sons has the old gentleman?"

"Three."

"Where are they?"

"I do not know."

"Is not one of them here in this town?"

"I have heard so, but I do not know him, nor he me. He was very young when I left home, and I would probably not recognize him now, if I should see him."

"You do not know whether one is a porter or not?"

"I do not, although it is hardly likely. There is one a reporter, I have heard, however."

"Ah, that is probably where my informant made the mistake," mused the detective, reflectively. "By the way," he went on, after a

pause, "did not somebody come to your house early this morning and notify your brother that I was here after him?"

"Certainly not," returned the other, promptly.

"Are you sure?"

"Well—"

"Is it not possible that he might have come and you not know it?" interrupted Thad.

The big man reflected a moment.

"Now that you speak of it, I do recollect that my brother was out very early—said that he had been taking a walk. It may be that he met some one, as you suggest, although I cannot imagine who it could have been."

"Perhaps I can enlighten you."

"Eh?"

"In my opinion it was your father."

"You astonish me!"

"Nevertheless, I believe it to be true. At least I met him near your house early this morning, and I cannot imagine where else he could have been, unless to your house."

"Understand me!" shouted the big man almost indignantly. "He was not at my house."

"I beg your pardon," said Thad in a kindly tone. "It was not necessarily at your house—that is true enough. He might easily have met your brother somewhere outside. At all events, I met him near your house, and I was impressed with the idea that he had informed your brother as soon as I saw the latter apparently trying to conceal himself over on the island."

The big man did not reply at once, but after a season of reflection, he observed in a dreamy tone:

"You know him, then?"

The question staggered the detective.

It had not occurred to him that the old man with the white beard might not be the fisherman's step-father after all.

We are so apt to let a theory become crystallized and get to accept it as an indisputable fact, that we are sometimes shocked to find all of a sudden that there is no truth in it after all.

For some moments Thad was so impressed, and was, in consequence unable to reply.

"Well, no," he finally faltered. "I cannot say that I am quite sure that I know him. There is a man—an elderly, gray-bearded man—whose name is McDermot, and whom I have somehow taken it for granted was your step-father, although there is a bare possibility that I may be mistaken. The man I refer to is tall, dark and impressive in appearance, with a flowing gray beard and an eye as keen and black as an eagle's."

"That is he, I guess. Does he act rather queer sometimes?"

"Rather. The first time I saw him was when he approached me on Broadway and asked me for alms."

"You don't say!"

"Yes. Did you ever know him to do anything of the kind?"

"Never. I do not understand it."

And Grosvener got up and paced the floor again.

"This man has a son," pursued Thad, "by the name of John. He is a fisherman, and lives in this town. It was he that showed me where you live."

"Where I live?" echoed the fisherman, dreamily. "That is strange. And yet I do not know any fisherman named McDermot."

"He does not live near the Sound with the rest of the fishermen, but at the opposite end of the town, and in a neat cottage which is furnished in a style betokening prosperity and comfortable circumstances."

"Very strange," mused the big man, still dreamily.

"There is one strange thing about it, though," continued the detective. "This young man appears to be very illiterate. He talks like the most ignorant sailor along the docks."

The big man stopped in his walk squarely in front of the detective.

"Is he short and stout, with a very red face and several scars about it?"

"That describes him to a T."

"I know him. He is not the old man's son at all. He is a boy whom he adopted after Ed and I left home. He is an ignoramus, I have understood, and the old man never took any pains to educate him because the fellow had no taste for learning. He preferred to do any kind of drudgery."

The fisherman grew silent and resumed his walking up and down the room.

"Now I want to make you a proposition, Mr. Grosvener," continued Thad.

The big man stopped in front of him again.

"It seems a hard thing to ask you to do," the detective went on. "But this is an urgent case. If your brother comes back to your house, I want you to let me know."

The big man stared hard at him through the darkness, and Thad would have given a good deal to have seen the expression of his face just then.

It was a full minute before he spoke, and then he replied:

"You want me to help to catch my brother, eh?"

"Yes. That is—"

"And he will probably be hanged if he is caught, won't he?" he interpolated.

"Most likely. But—"

"Then you must count me out. Bad as he is, he is my brother, and it shall never be said that John Grosvenor was a party to the killing of his brother. No, sir, you must get somebody else to do that, for I never will. And that reminds me that I must go home. It must be very late."

"But remember, he has wronged you—deeply wronged you," persisted Thad.

"All the more reason why I should not wrong him in return. You remember I would not kill you, even after you had tried to take my life, and I did not know but you would attempt it again."

"That is true, and I shall not urge you. Still, you will not throw anything in my way?"

"To prevent my brother's arrest?"

"Yes."

"Certainly I will. If he comes to me and asks me to protect him, I shall do it at the expense of my life."

"Very well. We understand each other. And you must not hold me responsible for what occurs."

"Of course not. I shall expect you to kill me, if you have occasion."

"That is what I shall do, although it will go against the grain to kill such a noble, self-sacrificing fellow as you."

"Good-night," said Grosvenor, without any comment upon the last words of the detective.

"Good-night," responded Thad.

And the fellow was gone.

Thad was not long in getting to bed after his departure, and slept soundly until six o'clock, when he arose and left the hotel.

It was still gloomy, and a heavy mist filled the air, although it was not raining.

The detective made his way toward the beach, and was soon in the vicinity of Grosvenor's hut again.

He entertained a suspicion that McDermot might not have gone after all, or if he had, that he might have returned.

There was nobody to be seen outside the hut, and the detective knocked at the door.

The woman came to the door, and to his surprise, greeted him almost cheerfully.

"I forgot something last night," were Thad's first words.

"What was it?" she demanded, with a frown, glancing back into the cabin curiously. "I ain't seen nothin' 'bout."

"This," rejoined Thad, slipping a five-dollar bill into her hand.

"And now I want to ask you whether your husband has gone to the island this morning or not, and whether his brother came back last night or not."

He had hurried his inquiries for the reason that he saw a cloud gathering in the woman's face and he desired to get through before it burst.

By the time he had finished his catechizing the woman's face was about as dark as any human visage he had ever beheld.

She glared at him as though she could have eaten him, and before she opened her lips, she dashed the money from her and it went sailing and rippling down to the ground.

"Take your dirty money!" she snarled. "Try to bribe me, will yer? No, I won't tell yew whether he's gone or not, ner whether Ed got back! Ef yew'd 'a' ast me decent, 'bout a-try-in' tew bribe me, I might 'a' told yew, but neaw I'll see yew drowned fust!"

And the woman shut the door in his face.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN HOT PURSUIT.

THAD had to smile at the woman's indignation, but he saw that he had made a mistake, and deplored his stupidity.

Still, how was he to know that she would resent his offer so indignantly? From what she had hinted about people coming to her house and not paying anything, the night before, he imagined that she would be only too glad to accept the money.

He picked up the bill and put it into his pocket and sauntered off a little way and secreted himself behind a small bathing-house where he could watch the hut, and remained there for the next hour or more.

As he saw nothing of either Grosvenor or McDermot at the end of that time, he made up his mind that they had really gone to the island, and was about to return to the hotel, but just then a great overgrown lump of a boy came along. He stared at Thad and the latter saw or imagined he did, a resemblance in him to the big fisherman.

So well satisfied was the detective that he had guessed correctly that he made bold to ask:

"My boy, has your father gone to the island?"

"Dunno," was the dogged reply.

"You are John Grosvenor's boy, aren't you?"

"Yep. But I ain't saw paw this mornin'."

"How is that?"

"'Cause, I ain't bin hum."

Then it all flashed upon Thad. This was

evidently the boy who had gone off and left his father on the island, and he was afraid to go home lest he should be punished.

"Why haven't you been home?" demanded the detective.

The boy looked at him in a frightened sort of way, as though he was not quite certain whether he had better answer or take to his heels. But he finally appeared to think the former would be safe enough, so he replied:

"'Cause, I'm 'fraid."

"Afraid your father will wallop you for leaving him on the island yesterday, eh?"

"Yep."

And the boy looked more surprised than ever. He was evidently trying to get it through his thick brain how in creation the detective found that out.

"That was a pretty mean trick, my boy," continued Thad.

"But I c'u'n't help it."

"Why not?"

"'Cause my uncle made me."

"I see. But he did not prevent you from going after your father afterward, did he?"

"Yep. He made me take him to the Brake."

"The what?"

"The Brake."

"What's that?"

"It's a place on th' Rye road," murmured the lad, getting worse and worse frightened momentarily, and at this juncture preparing to run.

Thad was too quick for him, however, and making a spring caught him just in time.

"Don't be in a hurry, my boy," admonished he. "I am not going to hurt you, and I want to talk to you."

"But I daren't," pleaded the boy, beginning to whimper.

"Why not?"

"'Cause, my uncle said if I told anybuddy, he'd skin me."

"I won't let him hurt you, my boy. Besides, he won't know anything about it."

"Oh, yep, he will. Mam'll tell him all about it, an' then he'll skin me."

"Look here, my boy, your mother will know nothing about it, and if you will tell me, I will give you this."

And Thad showed him a bright new dollar-piece.

The lad shook his head and tugged to get away.

"Well, then, I will give you this," said the detective, showing him the five-dollar bill which had thrown his mother into such a rage.

The boy looked at the money in wide-eyed and open-mouthed wonder.

He had evidently never seen so much money in his life, much less owning it.

"What is it?" he finally asked.

"Five dollars," replied Thad.

"And you'll give me all that?"

"Yes, if you will tell me where the Brake is, that is, how far it is from here, what kind of a place it is, and whether your uncle is still there or not."

The boy grinned and gazed wistfully at the money.

"An' yer won't tell mam?" he queried.

"Certainly I won't."

"Ner Uncle Ned?"

"No."

"Ner pop?"

"Nor him either."

The boy hesitated, grinned and shook his head.

"I'd like the five dollars," he giggled.

"Well, tell me what I have asked you, and you shall have it."

"Wal, the Brake's on the Rye road, 'bout five miles from hiar, an' it's a—a—"

"What?"

"What you call a tavern by the road, I guess," faltered the lad.

"A road-house, you mean."

"Yep."

"An' is your uncle still there?"

"I dunno, but I reckon he is, fer he's out o' money an' wanted me to come back an' ast dad fer so no fer him."

"And you are afraid to see your father, eh?"

"Yep."

"What do you propose to do about it?"

"I dunno."

"Well, here is the money," said the detective, handing him the promised bill. "Now, run along. Your father has gone to the island, and you will have no chance to see him before night to get any money for your uncle."

"No, but I'll take him this," replied the lad.

"A chip off the old block," thought Thad.

"Never mind," he observed, addressing the boy. "I'll go and see your uncle and give him all the money he wants."

"Will you?"

And the boy's face brightened up. But the next instant it darkened again, and an expression of suspicion swept over it.

"No you won't," he cried. "You want to arrest my uncle. You're a pleeceman!"

"Very well, then, I'll let you go."

And Thad, seeing that he had all he could get out of the little fellow in the way of information, turned away and left him.

When he had got some distance away, he

glanced back at the lad, and saw that he was still looking after him with that same distrustful look, and then suddenly he saw the boy's mother approach him from behind, grasp him by the ear with one hand, and with the other snatch the five-dollar bill away from him.

"That puts an end to his expedition to assist his uncle," mused the detective, "and before he can see his father I will be out to the Brake and have that gentleman in custody."

Thad hastened back to the hotel and partook of a hurried breakfast, after which he procured a horse and put off at a good speed in the direction of the road-house.

An hour's ride brought him to a wayside inn the front of which was decorated with an enormous signboard on which was painted in glaring letters the words, "The Brake."

Hitching his horse and entering the bar, he called for refreshments and then, in a casual manner, asked if there had been a gentleman by the name of McDermot stopping there over night.

The landlord, who was also the bartender, informed him that no such person had been there.

Thinking that possibly McDermot had registered under an assumed name, the detective went on:

"Wasn't here, eh? Well, was there a tall man with a dark complexion, black eyes and dark beard, slightly mixed with gray?"

"Oh, that fellow?" exclaimed the landlord.

"Yes, he was here."

Thad's heart gave a bound.

"Is he still here?" he asked.

"No. He's been gone about an hour," the landlord replied, looking up at the clock.

Thad's heart went down again.

"Was he alone?" was the next inquiry.

"No, there was an old man with him."

"Um. Did the old man come with him?"

"No, he came after him this morning."

"Was the old man tall, with a long gray beard?" asked Thad, after a little reflection.

"Yes. The younger man called him father."

That was clear enough in all conscience, thought Thad.

The old man was his father, and he was doing all he could to prevent his son from being arrested.

"How did they leave here?" he asked.

"In a buggy."

"I will ask you one more question, and then I will trouble you no further. Which way did they go, sir?"

"Up the hill," responded the landlord, stepping to the door and pointing up the road. "Toward Rye."

"Thank you, sir."

And the detective made for the door, but the landlord, who had answered his questions so promptly, was determined to get something in return. So planting himself in front of Thad so as to block his progress, he asked:

"Crooks?"

"A little that way," rejoined the detective, making an effort to pass.

"Been in jail, or candidates?" continued the fellow.

"Both."

"Um. Bad lot, eh?"

"Rather." And Thad made another effort to get past, but the publican was not through with him yet.

"Where be they from, the city?"

"Yes. Let me go, please. I'm in a hurry."

"Sure." But the landlord held his own.

"So, you're a detective, I reckon?"

But Thad did not wait to answer the question.

Observing his opportunity at that moment, he made a spring and cleared the door, and in a moment more was astride his horse and going up the hill at a rapid pace.

For an hour or more he rode on at almost a break-neck speed, without seeing anything of the fugitives.

There were few travelers abroad this dreary day, but such as he met he made inquiries of, but for a long time he could hear nothing of his men. But after awhile he began to hear of them, and was gratified to learn that he was gaining upon them.

At length they appeared to have given him the slip, for he could hear nothing of them, and he concluded that they must have taken a different road. But not knowing what else to do, he pressed on.

He knew that the town of Rye was not far off and that there was a railroad station there.

McDermot was undoubtedly making for that point, and if he reached it, there was no telling which way he would go.

Spurring his horse to his highest speed, the detective hastened on toward the town, and was soon within a mile or so of it, when he was surprised at meeting a buggy with a single man in it, driving leisurely along.

The man was old McDermot, Edward's father.

The latter did not appear to see the detective until he was right upon him and Thad had reined in in front of his horse.

The old man started convulsively at sight of him, but soon regained his composure and eyed him calmly.

"Well, sir?" demanded the old man.

"What has become of your passenger?" asked Thad sternly.

"What passenger?" innocently.

"Never mind your dissimulation," cried Thad savagely. "You know well enough whom I mean. Where is he?"

The old man's only reply was a burst of derisive laughter.

"See here, old man, if you do not answer my question," roared Thad, "I shall forget to respect your gray hairs!"

With that he whipped out a revolver and leveled it at him.

McDermot turned pale.

"For God's sake don't shoot me, sir!" he cried in great alarm. "I will tell you all I know!"

"Out with it, then!"

"My son took the train at Rye," he faltered.

"Which way did he go?"

"Before Heaven, I do not know!"

Without another word, Thad rode up to the side of the buggy, and, putting his pistol to the old man's head, said, in cool, determined words:

"Now, do you tell me which way he went, or by Heaven, you are a dead man!"

The old man fell to trembling so that he dropped the reins, and he was about to drop on his knees in the bottom of the buggy, when from some cause, the horse took flight and started off at the top of his speed. The road made an abrupt descent at this point, and for a minute or two, as Thad sat watching him, it looked as though the buggy would be dashed to pieces or go into the gutter.

By degrees, however, the old man managed to gather up the reins and direct the horse in the middle of the road, but by this time he was so far away that the detective decided not to follow him, especially as he was more than half inclined to believe his last statement, to the effect that he did not know which way his son had gone.

He would only be losing time in following him, and could doubtless obtain the information he wanted at the station.

So the detective once more turned his horse's head in the direction of Rye, and in a few minutes more arrived at the station.

An inquiry at the ticket-office brought forth the information that his man had taken the train for New York city.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRINCELY BUTLER.

It was near the middle of the afternoon when Thad reached the station at Rye, and the next train was not due before seven something that evening.

So, he saw that he could return to New Rochelle on horseback, and from there take the train, and then reach the city sooner than he could by waiting for this train.

He therefore retraced his steps, and two hours later arrived once more in New Rochelle.

He lost no time in getting to the depot, and was none too early, for there was a train due in about ten minutes, which he boarded, and was back in the city by eight o'clock.

On arriving at the Grand Central depot he had himself driven directly to his room on Thirty-ninth street, where he had the cab wait for him at the curb.

Darting up to his room, the detective made a hasty toilet, and made himself up as a young swell, donned a long cape-coat and fur cap and returned to the cab. The driver did not recognize him as the same man who had ordered him to wait, but a word of explanation, accompanied by a substantial tip, sufficed to make matters easy all round, when he once more entered the vehicle and had himself driven to the Gilsey House.

He was fortunate enough to find Nevin in, who, as usual, mistook him for somebody else.

"Confound your protean art!" growled Nevin, when he discovered who Thad was. "One never knows what you will assume next. You are like a chameleon, change your color whenever you choose. The next thing I'll be mistaking other people for you, and addressing my washer-woman as 'My Dear Thad.' Curse my everlasting buttons, if I do not forget how you really look when you are yours-elf!"

"Well, are you done?" demanded the detective, dropping wearily into a chair and drawing a deep sigh.

"Yes, for the present," drawled his friend.

"Have a cigar. What is new?"

"A good deal. But first let me hear from you. Have you seen or heard from that butler since I left?"

"Yes. He has been up here to ask about you a dozen times, I guess. He left here not more than an hour ago. He came to tell me that your man had got back."

"Which I knew four hours ago, although I was not sure that he would return to his own house. By Jove, that fellow has the assurance of Old Nick himself!"

"McDermot?"

"Yes. When he knows that I am hot on his track, to think that he would come back to the very place of all others where he must know that he will be sought!"

"I do not know so well about that," mused Nevin, lazily. "While you might look for him there, most detectives would seek him away from home."

"Not if they understood their business. A criminal, like a rabbit, always, or nearly always, runs in a circle, and the best place to find him is at his starting-point. There appears to be a fascination for a criminal about the spot where his crime was committed. But to return to the butler: What had he to report; how did he discover that McDermot had returned, etc.?"

"How he discovered it I'll never tell you, because he did not explain it to me; but what he discovered was the fact that the old man, as he calls him, arrived at the house some time after five, and at seven, a little before the time the butler saw me, he had not been seen to leave the house."

"By George! that fellow's a champion! I'll bet he's taken up his position somewhere as a sentinel and kept a watch on the house ever since I left."

"I shouldn't wonder, for he has been here about every two hours to report that the old man had not returned yet. I did not know why he should have reported this to me, and asked him once why he did not telegraph to you, as you had instructed him to do; but he replied that his instructions were to telegraph in case McDermot returned, and not if he did not return."

"That's right. I did not care to spend money for telegrams to give me news which I did not want to hear. I had enough of that where I was. Still, I do not see what the fellow wanted to bother you with his nonsense."

"Don't mention it. It was no bother to me. The bother was all on his side, and I really felt a good deal of compassion for the fellow, when I considered the amount of walking he was doing and the number of shoes he was probably wearing out, uselessly. But then he seemed to enjoy it, and I never like to interfere with anybody's enjoyment, as the fellow remarked when he saw the man start to caress a buzz-saw."

"Well, old fellow," broke in Thad, rising to go and looking his friend over critically, "I must go, but before I go, allow me to congratulate you upon your quick recovery from your little episode. Your eye has nearly regained its normal color."

"Apparently, but not really," growled Nevin. "That beautiful orb is masquerading like yourself, under false colors. The amount of water-colors smeared upon that optic would paint a large Watteau. But I had to do it. There is nothing that attracts so much attention to one as a black eye, and you know how I abhor fame."

Thad laughed at the fellow's drollery.

"You're a queer fish, Nev," he remarked. "But to change the subject, where do you imagine I would be most likely to find the butler?"

"Why, the best place is your own apartments, if you do not want to remain here. He always goes to your rooms first, and not finding you there, comes here. It is now within half an hour of the time that he should report here, and he will go there first. However, as there is a chance of missing him there, you may as well remain here."

"Well, I'll tell you, I haven't been to dinner yet, so I will just run out and get something to eat, and if he comes in the mean time, keep him until I return."

"I'll do it."

And the detective took his departure.

Going to the nearest restaurant, he partook of a hasty meal, and half an hour later returned to Nevin's room.

Boggs had not yet put in an appearance, and Thad sat down to wait for him.

The butler came soon after, however, excited and flushed from rapid walking. He was too much out of breath to speak for a moment, and the detective had time to address him first before he recovered his voice.

"Well, old fellow," said Thad, shaking his hand warmly, "what is the latest? I have already heard that McDermot is back. Anything later?"

"Ye—yes," gasped the butler, breathing heavily. "He—he's there still, and preparing so go."

"Go? Where?"

"That I could not discover; but the new butler—he's a friend of mine—thinks he's going a long way off from the preparations he's making for the journey."

"Then we must intercept him. Is there any way of getting into the house?"

"Yes. I've arranged it to smuggle you in by way of the area door. The new butler will attend to that. But—" The butler paused and looked Thad over. "I'm afraid," he went on in an uncertain tone, "I'm afraid that outfit won't do."

"Why?" queried the detective.

"Why, you see, sir, it's the arrangement that you're to come in as the new butler's friend, and butlers don't commonly have friends that tog out quite so smart as you. Something like a servant or another butler—well dressed, but different."

"Why don't you get two or three policemen

to go with you and take him by storm?" interposed Nevin.

"Experience has taught us that that won't do," replied Thad. "The fellow's too well prepared for open attacks. He would make his escape anyhow, if the house was surrounded. No, we have got to proceed as we have been going, quietly; and above all, avoid arousing suspicion."

"Well, sir, I'm ready," observed Boggs, anxiously. "But—" Here he gave another glance at Thad's make-up.

"Never mind that," said the detective, comprehending his meaning. "I shall go as I am. Let it be understood that I am a butler or head waiter from Delmonico's or some place like that. Come! Good-night, Nev."

"Good-night. Let me know how you come out."

"Sure. By the way, why not come along?"

"Excuse me! Anything else but the detective business for me. Let the color get out of my eye and maybe I'll talk to you."

Thad and the butler left the hotel and were soon on their way toward the Madison avenue mansion.

The weather had cleared, the stars were shining and a cold, stiff breeze blowing.

"Not a very desirable night to be out for a long time," observed the detective, as they hurried along.

"No, sir; and yet I've scarcely been under a roof an hour at a time since you went away."

"You don't say!"

Thad was astonished and naturally warmed toward the poor fellow for his zeal.

However, he reflected a little later that there might be something more than ordinary zeal behind the butler's heroism. He certainly had no cause for friendship toward McDermot, and it might be that a thirst for revenge actuated his motive as much as a desire to bring the culprit to justice. Still, for all that he could not but admire the fellow's courage and persistency, and realized that he had an able assistant in him.

When they reached the house the detective remained on the sidewalk while the ex-butler proceeded to the area door to see if all was right.

In a few minutes he returned to Thad, who was standing in the shadow of the veranda, and touching him on the arm, whispered that the coast was clear.

When Thad started to go into the area he noticed that Boggs remained behind.

"Are you not coming, too?" he asked.

"No, sir," he replied. "I will stay here and watch. It won't do for me to go in. The servants would know at once that something was up, and report it to the old man, and then the jig would be up with us. It's all right. The butler understands."

For some reason Thad suspected that all was not right.

He disliked to suspect the butler, who had served him so faithfully, but for the life of him he could not help but think that there was something strange and unnatural in the fellow's actions when he returned to him.

But after a moment's reflection, he decided that he had been mistaken and cast the unjust suspicion from him.

"Very well," he said, cheerfully. "You remain out here and keep a close watch upon the house, and if you see him come out let me know at all hazards, if possible."

"That is what I intended doing. If the old man put in an appearance I will let you know through the butler. He understands."

Again Thad was impressed with the fellow's action. It was only when he uttered the words "He understands," that he noticed it. There was a strange twitching of the mouth and a dropping of the eye similar to what he had observed in bunco-steerers and whippers-in for low dives when they were trying to convince a raw countryman "that it was all right." But he was determined, even now, not to allow his suspicions to get the better of what he considered his reason, and without more ado hurried away from him and entered the area.

The butler's assurance that it was all right was verified when, at the first touch of the bell the door was thrown open to admit the detective.

A short stout man stood before Thad, holding the door open for him and smiling from ear to ear.

"This is the butler from Del's, is it?" whispered the new butler.

"Yes," replied Thad in the same cautious tone although he could not see the necessity for whispering inasmuch as it was understood that he was a fellow-servant.

And again the detective felt that there was something wrong somewhere.

Without more ceremony Thad was ushered into the servants' common room, which was in the basement, where he was introduced to the rest of the help as "Mr. Johnson," butler from Delmonico's. This naturally established him on a very aristocratic footing, and the other servants looked upon him as a member of the Four Hundred looks upon a prince or duke. But what was puzzling Thad was, how he was to conceive an excuse to get up-stairs, and that before his man should have time to get out.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SLY LITTLE SPY.

FROM the very moment Thad entered the servants' sitting-room he saw that the part he was playing was a bad one and the whole scheme of the ex-butler was going to be a dismal failure.

The more he reflected upon it, and the harder he tried to devise some excuse for getting up-stairs, the more he became convinced that his first theory was correct.

What pretense, he mused, could a strange butler have for going up-stairs among the people of the house?

The more he puzzled over it, the more complex became the problem.

The conversation was animated among the servants, at first a little constrained on account of the presence of the stranger, and after a while addressed more or less to him, and consisted largely of questions touching the service and the size of the tips at a place like Delmonico's; but later it became general and related to the affairs of this household.

Still, there was little to interest the detective for a long time, and he busied himself in trying to devise some scheme to carry out the project for which he was there.

And just here the housekeeper entered with a fresh batch of gossip and all the servants gathered about her to hear what it was.

Hoping that it might relate to something about McDermot, Thad also became interested.

"What do you think?" she began. "The master starts for Europe to-morrow and takes the missus with him and the house will be shut up for a year and all the help's to receive three months' pay and notice, and everybody to be told who calls to-night and to-morrow that he's already gone."

"What's that for?" asked the new butler, who was evidently not acquainted with the mysterious ways of his master.

The housekeeper looked knowingly at the assistant housekeeper, who in turn glanced suspiciously at the strange butler from Delmonico's, and then back at the housekeeper and winked.

The latter evidently understood this mute language, for she followed up her speech with: "I don't care. At another time I might. But as I am to receive three months' wages and notice, I would just as lief strangers heard my mind as not. In my humble opinion there's something wrong."

There was an expression of alarm all along the circle of faces, and a general glancing at each other.

And the new butler asked timidly:

"What do you mean?"

"Mean?" exclaimed the woman. "It's easy seeing you've not been here long. If you'd have been here last week when the murder took place you wouldn't ask that."

"But," suggested the second cook, "I thought it was understood that it was the butler done that."

"Butler, your grandmother!" ejaculated the woman in a loud voice. "Why hasn't he been arrested? Tell me that. If the master knew or even suspected the butler, d'ye think he wouldn't have had him arrested long before this? And then why did the master suddenly disappear that same night and nobody, not even the missus, knowed where he was until he came back? And now he's a-going away again in a suspicious kind of a way? What does it all mean?"

And the housekeeper shot a pitying glance at the new butler, which said as plainly as words that she did not think much of his judgment if he failed to see through the whole matter, and then sunk exhausted into a chair.

"But I thought the old butler was arrested," ventured the second cook.

"No. I saw him to-day," resumed the housekeeper. "And more than that, I heard the master tell the missus, the night of the murder, that although it looked a good deal like the butler had done it, it wouldn't do to have him arrested, because the butler knew some things which he (the master) wouldn't like to have known, and he was just the man to tell them if he was arrested."

"But there was a man arrested in the garden that night," remarked the assistant-housekeeper, "and got away. Maybe he done it."

"Like enough he did," assented the housekeeper, with a sneer. "But allowing that he did, take my word for it, the master knew more about it than he'd ought to. And it's my opinion that the master told the old butler that he needn't be alarmed, for Boggs was as cool as a cucumber when the detective that was here was talking to him."

"You don't mean to insinuate that the master hired the man to do it, do you?" queried the second cook.

"I say nothing. Facts is facts, and theories is theories. I've told you the facts and you kin form your own theories."

Thad was in worse suspense now than ever.

If he could only have asked whether McDermot intended leaving the house that night or not he would have been satisfied; but being a stranger who was not supposed to take any particular interest in the household affairs, the question would have appeared highly impertinent.

However, while he was still thinking about it, one of the other servants came to his relief.

"The master won't leave the house to-night, then, I s'pose?" interposed the servant in question.

"No, that I am sure of, for he told the missus that he hoped to get one night's rest—a thing he hadn't had for a week."

The detective's mind was made up as to what course to take.

Now was his time to act.

He must get up-stairs at all hazards.

But how was he to do it without arousing the suspicions of the servants?

This was necessary, as it would be perfectly natural for some of them to inform on him.

He supposed, of course, that the old butler had informed the new one who he was and what his intended mission would be, so the only course open to him was to get this fellow aside and acquaint him with his plans.

So, contriving at length to catch the fellow's eye, Thad made a sign indicative of his desire to see him alone.

The butler understood him, and withdrew into the hall, whereupon the detective arose, excused himself and joined the butler.

"Boggs told you who I am, and what I came here for, didn't he?" he whispered as soon as the door was closed.

"Yes, sir, he told me that you was a detective and wanted to see if any of the servants was guilty of the murder of the secretary," rejoined the butler. "That's what I took you into the sitting-room for, so that you could hear them talk."

Thad was disgusted.

This put him off further than ever from his object.

He cursed inwardly the stupidity of Boggs, and at the same time wondered how this fellow would take it if he were told the truth.

However, that was the only way out of it now, so he determined to risk it.

"Well, not exactly that," he whispered. "The fact is, as you heard some of the servants hint, there is a suspicion that the master was at the bottom of it, and—"

"Do you believe it?" interrupted the butler, whose face had grown as white as a sheet.

"It is not a matter of belief with me, my good fellow," observed Thad, in a cordial tone. "I am here for the facts, and must not be restricted to any one part of the house."

"But you cannot go up-stairs, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because the master has already retired, I understand. At least he gave orders not to allow any one to disturb him to-night, as he was ill and very tired."

"I cannot help that," retorted the detective, sternly. "The law is no respecter of people's feelings, and I must go up."

"But you cannot, sir."

"Why?"

"I have already told you, sir. That is my order, and my place depends upon my obedience to orders."

"But, my good man, your place is already at an end, as you heard the housekeeper say."

"That is all very well, but I want a character don't I?" persisted the butler, who was growing very nervous.

Thad began to see that persuasion was never going to avail him anything. He must adopt some sterner method.

"Look here, my good man!" he demanded in a gruff voice, "are you going to jeopardize your own liberty by standing in the way of the law—by interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty?"

The butler's knees began to smite together painfully, and he assumed an imploring attitude which was so pitiful that it reminded the detective of the miserable secretary.

"No, no, no, I do not want to do anything wrong, sir, but think of my situation and of my family, if I lose it and have no character! Please don't go up, sir!"

"Nonsense!" cried Thad impatiently. "He will know nothing of it, he will never know that you had anything to do with my going up. Besides, your master will never be allowed to leave the city, and when he is arrested what will your character from him amount to? Stand aside and let me up, or I shall have to arrest you!"

This did the work. The frightened butler hopped aside as though he had been pricked with a needle.

Thad ascended one or two steps, and happening to glance back at the butler, and noticing that the poor wretch's face was a picture of woe, he could not refrain from whispering a word of condolence in his ear.

"Don't be alarmed, my good man," he said. "He shall never know that it was your fault that I went up—as indeed it is not. And when it comes to a character, I'll give you one that will be worth two of his any day. Cheer up, old fellow."

But the butler would not cheer up.

His heart was broken. His place was sacrificed and, without a character from his last employer, he saw no hope of securing another, and he was inconsolable.

While this little episode was going on Thad noticed that somebody slipped past him and ran up the stairs in great haste, but thought nothing of the circumstance. In fact, he did not even notice who it was.

But he did notice a moment later that the butler suddenly became more cheerful, but he attributed it to his own words of consolation.

The fact was, it was the assistant housekeeper, and if the detective had chanced to glance at the little mix as she darted up-stairs and shot a furtive glance back at him ever and anon, he would have suspected that something was wrong in dead earnest, but at that moment he was too much taken up with his condolence of the butler, and gave no heed to the little assistant housekeeper.

A moment later Thad went up-stairs.

He needed no direction now regarding the lay of the house. He had become thoroughly acquainted with that on the night of the murder, and as he climbed the stairs a thought occurred to him.

He would go directly to McDermot's bedroom and knock in a manner that no servant would dare to knock, and then without waiting for a response, dart up to the room where the elevator disgorged, and from which the secret stairway led down into the back yard.

Alarmed at the extraordinary knock, McDermot would doubtless jump onto his elevator and have himself hoisted up into this room, when the detective would place him under arrest and take him quietly out the back way without alarming the household.

He therefore proceeded to McDermot's room and administered a terrific knock at the door, and then darted up the next flight of stairs at the top of his speed.

But he had not got more than half-way up when he heard the room door open and, glancing back to see who had opened it, was surprised to see the little assistant housekeeper emerge therefrom and close the door behind her.

In spite of his haste the detective could not avoid slackening his pace enough to watch the actions of the little woman for an instant, and was rewarded by seeing her deliberately pause, look up at him and indulge in a derisive little laugh.

The action sent a chill through him.

He understood the whole affair now as well as though she had explained it in so many words.

He now recalled the fact that she had passed him on the stairs, and knew as well as though she had told him or he had seen it all, that she had gone up for no other purpose than to inform her master that he was in the house and would soon be after him. He did not stop to ask himself how she should have known that he was a detective. He felt that his theory was correct, and had no use for reason.

If he had needed any proof in the matter, finding the elevator up and the outside one down and the garden door open, was enough to convince him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WRONGED WIFE'S TESTIMONY.

THAD took his disappointment philosophically.

Whether it was because he had more than half doubted the success of the expedition from the first, or because this rogue had given him the slip so often that he had ceased to mind it, he did not feel the same amount of worry over it this time that he usually did.

There was one thing of which he felt confident: If McDermot continued to give him the slip in every other way, he would overhaul him before he had an opportunity to sail for Europe.

But he was anxious to capture him before then, as the detective would be compelled to call in the assistance of the police most likely if McDermot was allowed to board a steamer, and Thad was bent upon making the arrest unaided, if possible.

Thad did not attempt to follow the fugitive, but turned and left the room and went down-stairs.

When he reached the next floor he was surprised to find a handsome lady who could not have been more than eighteen, standing in front of the door from which he had seen the little assistant housekeeper emerge some minutes before.

She watched the detective all the way down the stairs, but he did not notice her until he had arrived nearly opposite to her.

He raised his hat to her and was about to pass on, when she put out her hand as an indication that she wished him to stop, and said, in a soft, gentle voice:

"Are you the detective, sir?"

The question was so unexpected that he was unable to reply for an instant, and she took advantage of the apparent hesitation on his part to continue:

"The under housekeeper told me that you were in the house, and that she believed you had come to arrest my husband. Is it true, sir?"

There was something so pathetic in the woman's voice, something so sad and heart-broken in the great dark eyes which bent on him, that

he was almost ashamed to confess the truth, and yet those same eloquent supplicants would not allow him to deceive her.

"It is true, madam, that my mission here is for the purpose you name," he said. "And for your sake, I am truly sorry—"

An impatient gesture from her caused him to pause.

"You need not waste any pity on me," she interposed in the same mild, pathetic tones. "May I speak to you in private, sir?"

Thad hesitated.

He disliked to deny her the interview, and yet much might be lost by the wasted time necessary for it.

It did not at that moment occur to him that this was only a clever woman's part to detain him in order that her husband might get safely beyond his reach before the detective was started; if he had he would not have hesitated for a reply.

But as he did not think of this—probably on account of the woman's soft voice and gentle, confiding eyes, those rogues which rob so many wise men of their reason—he did hesitate for some moments, and finally arrived at the conclusion that he could not do much that night anyway, and that there would be no harm in granting the interview, and so informed the lady.

Without another word, she pushed open the door at her back and invited him to enter. Thad obeyed and she was about to close the door when the face of the ex-butler, flushed from excitement, appeared before it. Boggs beckoned to the detective, and the latter excused himself and went to the door.

He glanced at the lady as he went out and noticed that her face had undergone a radical change. The soft, gentle expression had given place to a black scowl and the pathetic eyes glared like those of a tigress.

This gave him a sense of uneasiness, but he was too anxious to learn what the butler wanted to stop them.

As soon as he was outside the door, Boggs clutched his arm convulsively and whispered:

"My God, sir! what were you doing in that room with the missus?"

The question, under ordinary circumstances would have appeared to Thad a little impertinent, but he noted the man's state of excitement and overlooked it.

However, he did not answer the question, but simply asked instead:

"What is the matter, Boggs?"

"He's gone, sir!" was the excited response.

"I am aware of it," said the detective, coolly. "Is that all?"

The fellow was bewildered. He had evidently expected Thad to faint at the announcement, and sent a quick glance in the direction of the door where the woman had just disappeared, as if looking for the cause of the detective's dementia there.

"Yes, that's all," he rejoined, absently, still keeping his eyes on the door. "Was—was—it through your being in there that you allowed him to get away from you, sir?"

Thad was indignant enough at the impertinent question to have knocked the fellow down, notwithstanding he knew it was asked in the most perfect innocence of heart, and was about to retort rather angrily when the other hastened to observe:

"It is just like her, sir. I should have warned you against her. If she can detain you with her soft talk for half an hour, it will be just that much time gained for the old man. Come on, sir. You'd better get out of this house while you can!"

Thad was inclined to believe there was wisdom in the man's words; at the same time he had a repugnance to being commanded, or having it thought that he was afraid to act upon his own convictions, and so, instead of accepting the advice in silence, as he probably ought to have done, he simply laughed at the fellow's alarm, and said:

"Well, go on, my good fellow, if you are afraid of anything. As for myself, I have business here, and I shall remain. Good-night."

So saying he turned upon his heel and approached the door from which he had emerged a few moments before.

The ex-butler stood watching him with a horrified expression, as though he expected to see him lose his head any instant, and for this reason Thad did a thing which he had had no intention of doing if the fellow had gone on down stairs—he knocked at the door.

Another hasty glance at the butler's face showed him that it had assumed an even graver expression than when he had noticed it before, but he had not time to scrutinize it further, for the door swung open at that moment, and the beautiful woman stood before him once more.

The calm, gentle expression had returned to her face, and the eyes were as soft and pathetic as ever.

"Ah, you have not gone?" she said in her soft, musical voice. "I feared that you had. This is indeed kind of you. Sit down, please. I shall not detain you a minute. It is only to ask you a few simple questions."

She said all this with the door open, and kept her eyes fixed upon the astonished and

horrified face of the butler the whole time she was speaking.

She then closed the door, walked calmly across the room and sunk into a chair facing the detective.

She smiled graciously upon him, as she began:

"You think it strange that I should call you into my room at this hour of the night, knowing that you are a detective on the track of my husband, don't you?"

Thad admitted that the proceeding was a trifle out of the common, but supposed she had a motive—a perfectly proper motive, for it, and asked her to proceed to ask him whatever questions she desired answered as his time was precious.

"That is the way with all you men," she declared, sweetly. "Never a moment to spare outside of business—dry, tiresome business. 'There is my husband, for example. I do not see him once a week, scarcely, and when he does finally come home, he is so worn out that he has no spirit for anything.'"

Thad already began to see that the butler's words were justified when he said that this woman would keep him talking for half an hour for no other purpose than to detain him, and he cut her short with:

"While that is all perfectly true, madam, I must inform you now that I have no time to discuss it. If you have anything to ask me, ask it at once, without any more preliminaries, otherwise I must leave you now!"

She colored profusely at this abruptness, but saw that she was dealing with a sterner man than she had judged from his appearance, for it must be borne in mind that he was made up to represent a very nobby young dandy.

"Very well, sir," she assented, with a deeply drawn sigh. "I will come to the point at once, although I consider you awfully parsimonious of your time. As you are after my husband with a view to arresting him you evidently believe him guilty of the murder of the secretary. Am I right?"

"If you were not, madam, I should not be wasting my time hunting him, rest assured of that!"

"So I supposed," she went on with another sigh. "But what evidence have you of his guilt?"

"That I am not at liberty to disclose, madam. Suffice it, that I have sufficient evidence to justify me in pursuing him with a warrant for his arrest."

Thad was rapidly losing his patience, and wished to bring the interview to a close as soon as possible, as he believed she was only dallying with him to kill time, but her next remark slightly changed his opinion of the woman.

"There is little chance for his escape, I suppose," she resumed in an absent tone as though talking to herself, "and if he is really guilty I shall not put a hair in the way of saving him. Oh, sir, I have long believed my husband to be a very bad man. It is not alone because he has abused me; it is not merely that he has squandered my fortune and rewarded me with ill-treatment—blows—yes, sir, with actual blows! What do you think of that?"

"I can easily believe him capable of it, madam."

"I have heard many ugly rumors about him, and for a long time I was loth to believe them. I heard that he had murdered his first wife, but I did not believe it until he threatened to kill me. I heard that he had carried off a little child which was the son of his brother, and killed it. This I did not believe. But when he came home one morning about two, intoxicated, and with blood on his clothes, and when I questioned him about it he struck me and threatened to kill me, I believed all that had been told about him."

Here the woman broke down and began to sob.

"When was this that he came home with blood on his clothes, madam?" asked Thad, growing terribly interested.

"Two weeks ago, sir," she answered between sobs.

"On the seventh of January?"

"Let me see. Yes, I know it was on the seventh, since you speak of it, for his birthday came on the ninth—two days after, and I had worked him a beautiful pair of slippers, and when he saw them he was so mad that he threw them into the fire."

"Pleasant sort of man. I must say," commented the detective. "But do you know anything about his connection with this last murder, madam? Did he let any hint drop that led you to believe that he had done it?"

"No, sir. I did not hear or see anything that led me to believe he was guilty of that, unless it was his quick denial of it as soon as he came upstairs, and before I had said a word."

"Did he mention any one who he thought might be guilty of the crime?"

"Yes, sir. He said it was Packey Lynch."

"Packey Lynch, eh? Do you happen to know anybody by that name, madam?"

"No, sir, except from hearing my husband speak of him."

"You never saw him, then?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know that it is my opinion, madam, that Packey Lynch—so-called—is none other than your husband, Edward McDermot?"

"Is it possible?"

And her countenance assumed a horrified expression.

"I did not assert it as fact, madam. I merely said that I believed it to be so. However, we have a chance right here to prove it. Do you remember, or were you aware, that a man was arrested in the garden the night of the murder, and was afterward rescued by the mob?"

"Yes, sir, I heard of it."

"Were you aware of the fact at the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where was your husband then?"

"With me. It was he that told me of the circumstances."

Thad's countenance fell.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Quite sure."

"Sure that he was with you from the moment the man was arrested until he was rescued?"

"Yes, sir, every moment."

"Then, if that is true, my theory is wrong."

CHAPTER XXV.

A GHASTLY PRESENT.

THE explosion of a theory is extremely distressing to an ardent mind, and it was particularly so to Thad, who had weighed and measured the present one so much and so thoroughly that it had ceased to be a theory with him. It was a fact. And now to have it suddenly go to pieces was a blow from which he could not recover without an effort.

And, as a matter of fact, he had not even yet abandoned completely the opinion that Packey Lynch and Edward McDermot were one and the same person.

"I wish you would change your mind, Mrs. McDermot," he resumed after a silence of some moments, "and see if you do not recall that your husband related these circumstances after their occurrence, and that in the excitement of the moment you became a little confused in the matter of time."

She stared at him in blank amazement.

"I do not understand you, sir," she cried, a trifle petulantly.

"To make myself so plain, then, that a child could not help but understand me: at the time of the murder, and for some time after, I and the whole corps of servants were in the garden searching for the murderer, whom I, at least, believed to be your husband. My reason for believing so was founded upon the fact that I had heard him try to bribe the secretary to kill the butler a few moments before, and because the secretary quailed from very cowardice at the horrible deed, your husband threatened to take his life. My theory then was, as it is at present, that the secretary, whom he had finally prevailed upon to do the job, had faltered at the critical moment, and that, enraged at his weakness, and disappointed at the failure to accomplish his own purpose, your husband had, in a fit of frenzy, snatched the knife from the craven wretch and plunged it into his heart."

"Knowing these facts, I say, I followed by the whole pack of servants, rushed into the garden and began searching for the culprit. The garden was scoured from one end to the other, not a nook was left unsearched, and yet no sign of the murderer or anybody else could be found. It is impossible that he could have been concealed in that garden, I am positive of that. And then when I was about to leave the place, and was passing a clump of shrubbery which I had searched thoroughly a moment before, a fellow jumps out and attacks me. This was the man whom they called Packey Lynch, the man whom I arrested and who was rescued by the mob."

"But," interposed the woman, with a gleam of intelligence in her hitherto puzzled countenance, "if you had searched every part of the garden so thoroughly, how do you account for the fact that this man escaped your observation?"

"By the very theory that Packey Lynch and Edward McDermot are one and the same."

"I must confess that I still do not understand you, sir. You doubtless consider me very stupid, but I really do not see how the fact of my husband masquerading as another man would account for the fact of his being in a place which had been thoroughly searched without being discovered."

"It does, all the same. As a matter of fact, he was not there at the time. If the man called Packey Lynch was a real and separate personage he would have had to make his way into the garden from the outside, would he not?"

"Certainly."

"And, after committing the crime, he would have had to conceal himself there where he issued from?"

"Yes."

"And therefore have been discovered?"

"But he was not."

"For the simple reason, as I stated, that he was not there all the time. Now, that your husband went into the garden with the secretary is a fact beyond dispute, and that he suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from it is equally certain. It is quite as certain, again, that the man who was arrested was not there at the time of the search, but was there a moment later."

"Well?" with a puzzled countenance.

"Well, Edward McDermot, the moment he committed the murder, dodged into the secret door opening into the elevator, and had himself hoisted to his secret chamber, where he quickly disguised himself as the so-called Packey Lynch, jumped on the elevator again, rode down to the garden, concealed himself in the shrubbery just in time to pounce upon me as I was about to quit the garden."

A strange expression overspread the woman's face.

It could not be characterized as surprise, and yet there was a semblance to that; but it was upon the whole more like the sudden breaking down of the solid wall which self-confidence is apt to rear, and which the deluded creature who lurks behind it believes to be impregnable up to the very moment it tumbles about his ears. But this soon changed and gave place to a quick, bright look of intelligence which the detective had noticed before.

"Then you consider my husband a very clever adept in his way and more than ordinarily quick-witted in an emergency, do you?" she interrogated.

"Rather," he answered, wondering what she was coming at.

"He is not a man whom you would imagine to be at a loss for an alternative in the stress of a moment?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am at a loss to understand why he should have returned to the scene of his crime, after reaching a place of safety, when he must have known that he ran the risk of being arrested."

"The explanation is very simple, and entirely in accord with your notion of his acuteness. If he had not returned to the garden—the scene of the crime—he would have been pursued into the house at once, and in all probability, caught; while by returning, he knew that he would distract the attention of the authorities from their pursuit of him."

"At the same time," she persisted, "he ran the chance of being arrested, and must have known that his disguise would be penetrated as soon as they got him in prison."

"True enough," returned Thad, a little impatiently, "but he stood two chances to one of escaping by what appears to you a foolish venture. In the first place, he evidently expected to overpower the detective, and make his escape in that way, when the world would have said that the murder was committed by the ruffian who was found in the garden, instead of suspecting that McDermot did it; and in the second place, in the light of subsequent events, it is altogether likely that the rescue and all was arranged in advance."

"Then you think that my husband is connected with all those ruffians in some way?"

"I know it."

The woman collapsed. She appeared to have shot her last arrow and subsided into silence.

"Now, there are one or two questions which I desire to ask you, Mrs. McDermot, and then I must leave you."

"Yes?" dreamily.

"Did you hear the scream in the garden which aroused the rest of the household?"

"I did."

"Was your husband with you then?"

"Yes."

The detective arose to his feet.

"Madam, I am sorry to say it; but I must tell you that, after this assertion, which I know to be false, I am unable to accept any of your other statements, and my former theory is unshaken. I bid you good-night."

And he strode toward his door.

But before he reached it, she arose and crept after him so softly that he scarcely heard a sound as her little foot pressed the carpet.

Placing her hand gently upon his arm, she whispered almost inaudibly:

"Just one moment, sir, please."

When Thad looked down at her, those wonderful eyes seemed to be melting and pouring their liquid fire into his very soul.

Nerve himself as he would he could not help but pity her, and to feel that he had done a cowardly thing in insinuating that she had deliberately lied.

Still, it was one of those moments when he felt called upon to sacrifice sentiment for duty.

So he merely said in as cold a tone as he could summon under the circumstances:

"Well?"

"I hope you will not go away with the impression that I have uttered a deliberate and intentional falsehood. I may be mistaken," she went on in a passionate voice; "but it seemed so vivid in my mind that he was with me the very instant I heard the scream that I could have sworn it—could swear it now. Still, I may be mistaken. It may have been a moment af-

terward that he came to me and asked me if I had heard the scream."

Thad saw, or thought he saw, another evidence of McDermot's subtlety. It was barely possible that he had appeared before her for an instant after the occurrence and uttered the exclamation she referred to, for the purpose of impressing on her mind the fact that he was with her at the time of the murder.

"Tell me," he asked, in a quiet voice, "does your husband's room adjoin your own, madam?"

"It does, sir."

"And he appeared to you—coming in from his own room—almost at the very instant you heard the scream, to ask you if you had heard it?"

"Yes."

"Of course you cannot tell exactly how many seconds elapsed between the scream and his appearance?"

"No, sir, not to the exact second; but it could not have been more than half a dozen seconds."

"Even had he been in his own room at the moment he would have had to walk across the room, which would have occupied at least ten seconds, would it not?"

"Perhaps."

"Very well. To have taken the half dozen steps from the clump of shrubbery where the body was found to the elevator door, to have been shot up to his room and from that to walk into yours would not have occupied more than a minute, which, in your excited state, would have appeared to be no more than ten or fifteen seconds. That part is all plain enough. But there is another thing. Did he remain with you after that, or did he go down to ascertain the cause of the unearthly scream which had given your nerves such a shock?"

She hesitated and looked at the detective as though she was in doubt whether he was a spirit incarnate or just an ordinary prophet.

"He—went—down," she finally faltered, as though she would have rather not said it, but could not help herself.

"Ah, that explains the whole mystery!" he exclaimed almost rapturously, "and my theory is established beyond a question. Now, just one more word, and I am off. When does he expect to sail for Europe?"

She started and stared at him, this time as though she was sure he was some sort of a disembodied spirit.

Still, she realized that it was imperative that she should make an effort, and bringing in play her subtlest powers of dissimulation, she uttered:

"Europe?"

"Yes. You know, of course, that he intends to sail for Europe very soon. I want to ask you, in view of the fact that you have given me so much other valuable information, the exact time at which he expects to sail, and by what route."

The detective kept her eye captive with his own powerful orb during the whole of this speech, and never was human more completely enthralled. She was powerless either to remove her eyes from his or to further dissemble when he had concluded.

"To-morrow," came the helpless response.

"By what route?"

"I do not know. He did not inform me."

Thad felt that this was the truth, and did not dispute her, but continued:

"Do you accompany him, madam?"

"That was the intention; but as matters have developed, it is quite uncertain now."

Thad thought she was right, but from a different standpoint.

"Where is he now? Have you any idea?"

"Before God, I have not, sir! Any more than yourself?"

"I believe you. Is he likely to return here to-night?"

"That I do not know, either. In fact, I never know when he is likely to come or go. He never tells me his plans or intentions, and I have long since learned better than to ask him."

"That is all. I thank you for your courtesy and for the information you have given me, and which I did not expect when I entered your apartment. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," she responded, and closed the door, but as she did so, he caught a glimpse of her face and was astonished at the change which had come over it. The same malignant expression and the same dangerous fire in her dark eyes were there that he had noticed when the butler came to disturb the fore part of their interview.

What could it mean?

Was she already indignant at him for pumping secrets from her which she would rather have kept inviolate, and was already planning revenge?

When he reached the foot of the stairs, Thad was still more astonished to see the ex-butler standing there awaiting him.

The poor fellow gazed at him with an expression of mingled awe and distrust. Awe that he should have escaped from that awful presence and out of that mysterious room, alive; and apparent distrust of the honesty of Thad's motive in entering the room.

"I'm awfully glad," he cried, "that you got

out safe. But don't you think that the time might have been more profitably spent, sir?"

While the suggestion was offered in the humblest manner and with the most profound deference, there was a tone of impertinence in it that stung the detective.

"What do you mean, sir? Am I managing my own affairs, or are you doing it for me?"

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir!" cried the other with extreme humility. "I only wished to suggest—in a very humble way—that if you had come out with me at the time I first spoke to you, we might have caught him."

"What do you mean?" in a gentler voice.

"When he left here, he went to a place not a block from here—a saloon—and was there drinking for upward of an hour."

"The deuce! Why did you not tell me this in the first place, instead of whining about my leaving the house while I had a chance, as though you feared I would be murdered?"

"I did not know it then, sir. It was only by accident that I discovered he was at this place. I went in there to get something warm, when I was startled at the sound of his voice in one of the little stalls. I hurried back here and asked the butler if you'd come out yet and he said you hadn't, so I went back to the saloon to see if he was still there. He was, and I again came back, but you were still in the missus's room, and so on. But the last time I went, he was gone."

"That is unfortunate," murmured the detective. "However, I will have him yet. I am now going to my room to alter my disguise, when I will come back and watch for the fellow's appearance. He will undoubtedly come back some time during the night."

"All right, sir. I will keep watch till you get back."

"That is a good idea. I will not be gone long."

Thad walked to the corner and calling a cab, had himself driven to his apartments.

From the moment he entered the street door he began to meet with surprises. In the first place, the door was open, a thing he had never known to occur before at that time of night, and when he got up-stairs, the door of his room was open. This was a greater surprise yet. But his greatest surprise was yet to come. When he groped about and made a light, the glare which it threw over the room disclosed a horrible and ghastly surprise.

It was a human head lying on his table!

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNSUSPECTED TRAITOR.

To say that Thad was astonished and horrified is to state it mildly.

The ghastly head before him was that of a man of not more than forty, with a thin, wan visage and jet-black hair, and full beard of the same color. The skin had evidently been tallowy white in life, and the long, inky lashes which drooped over the half-open eyes, swept low upon the ashen cheeks. The eyes, which seemed to stare from beneath the dusky curtains, were as black as sloes.

The owner of the head did not appear to have been long dead, for, while the head was stiff and stark, the congealed blood about the neck was still fresh and undarkened by age.

That a murder had recently been committed there was little doubt, but the head meant more than this. It had been placed there by some of the wrong-doers whom the sleepless detective was surely hunting to their doom, or the friends of those who had already met their doom at his hands, or rather through his cunning and vigilance.

Thad's mind turned at once to Hell's Kitchen, and Jimmy's words of warning resounded in his ears like the echoes of a dreadful prophecy.

He soon recovered from the first shock which the horrid spectacle had produced in him, and at once set about attending to the business which had called him there.

Hastily changing his garments for a suit of plainer and more substantial quality, he made himself up to represent an ordinary business man. Having completed this task, he turned to the ghastly spectacle on the table and began to consider what was best to be done with it.

He was not long in making up his mind. He would wrap it in paper and take it to Police Headquarters.

He was just looking about for a paper for this purpose, when he was startled by a rap at the door.

It was long after midnight.

Who could be there at this late hour?

A thousand fancies flashed through his mind in a few seconds.

He did not fear any mortal who would meet him on an equal footing, but his experience with the denizens of Hell's Kitchen led him to expect anything except openness and fairness at their hands.

And if this should prove to be some of them, he knew that he had to deal with desperate men, and probably in such numbers as to overpower him.

His reflection had occupied but the fraction of

a minute, and yet it was long enough for the visitor to lose patience and rap a second time, and more vigorously than before.

At once he forgot the transitory apprehensions which had oppressed him a moment ago, and walked boldly to the door and opened it.

It was Boggs, the ex butler.

He was flushed and out of breath as usual, and was compelled to pause for breath for some minutes before he could speak.

"Well, what is up now?" asked the detective.

Up to that moment the butler had not had a chance to see his face from where he stood, but as he turned toward the light Thad's face came in full view.

Boggs, who had been about to speak, stopped short and stared at him, bewildered.

Thad guessed the cause of his consternation, and burst out laughing.

"Don't you know me, old fellow?" he laughed.

The butler also smiled now.

"Yes," he rejoined, "I know you now, but until you spoke, I'm blessed if I did. Nobody would know that you was the same person that left me half an hour ago."

"Quite a change, eh? Well, what brings you here? McDermot shown up again?"

"Yes, sir, that is— Good God!"

The butler had walked toward the table as he spoke, and having reached it, instinctively put out his hand to rest it on the table, when his hand came in contact with the death-head.

The poor fellow jumped several feet backward, turned deadly pale, and uttered the above exclamation.

The detective laughed.

"Not a pleasant sight, especially at night, eh, old fellow?"

"Heavens! no! What in creation are you doing with such things here?"

Thad started to relate how he had found the head on the table when he came in, when Boggs interrupted him with another exclamation.

"My God!" he ejaculated. "Don't you know who that is?"

The detective scrutinized the face now as he had not done before, and then it flashed upon him.

"By Jove!" he cried. "It is, as sure as fate!"

"Yes, sir, there is no doubt about it," added Boggs excitedly. "It is Filkins's head as sure as there is a heaven above us!"

Thad contemplated it in silence.

"I wonder that it did not occur to me before," he mused at length. "I was certainly impressed with that face the night of the murder deeply enough to last me the rest of my days. I do not understand why I should not have recognized it."

"But how came it here, do you suppose?" queried the butler.

"That will probably always seem a mystery. But my impression is that McDermot could explain it if he wanted to."

"Do you imagine he put it here?"

"He or some of his gang."

"They must have dug it up."

"Certainly. Where was Filkins buried?" asked the detective.

"In one of the smaller cemeteries over in Brooklyn," replied the butler.

"Well, we can do it no good by talking about it. Let us take it to Police Headquarters and then go and see about our man."

"Hain't we might as well leave it here until morning, sir? I do not want to dictate, but in my opinion he is going somewhere to-night."

"Very well. We will leave it here. Come on."

When Thad came to close his door he found that the lock was broken, but he did not consider that it mattered much, as he had nothing there but his trunk of make-ups, which he did not imagine anybody was likely to carry off before morning.

The cabman who had brought the detective over and whom he had told to wait, was still at the curb, and the two men got in.

"Now finish what you were saying about the return of McDermot," said the detective, as they drove off. "You remember you said that he had returned, but got no further owing to the scare you received from the sight of the head."

"Oh, yes. Well, as I said, he returned to the house. I saw him go in, and my friend, the new butler, told me that he was busy packing his trunks, which led me to believe that he was going off somewhere."

"He intends to sail for Europe to-day. Did you not know that?"

"No!"

"Yes. I had it from his wife's own lips."

The butler was silent a moment, and then he murmured:

"I shouldn't put too much faith in what she tells you, sir."

"Is she in the habit of stretching the truth?"

"I should call it lying, sir. When a lady gets so bad that her help won't believe her, she's beyond hope, and the missus is just that bad."

Thad had suspected as much before, and now that the butler had called it to his mind afresh, he began to consider whether he should put any

faith in her assertion that her husband was going to Europe.

It was all a ruse, in all probability, to throw him off the track.

But why had she expressed herself so freely about her husband?

That, too, might be a ruse, perpetrated for the purpose of inspiring confidence in herself.

"You think, then, that there is no likelihood of his going to Europe, or trying to go rather, for I shall see that he does not get off?"

"I don't believe it, at least not now. He may go later. But he hasn't money enough just now, for one thing, and another is, he must know that you would never let him out of the country."

"He should know it, at least."

"He's no fool, sir."

"I have had good reason to know that, my boy. But here we are at the house. Now what's the move?"

"I should say to go in," was the butler's brilliant suggestion.

"That is a good idea, but how?"

"I can arrange it with the butler again, sir."

"Will he be up as late as this?"

"Yes, sir. He's too badly scared at what you told him to sleep to-night."

"I have an idea," suggested Thad.

"Yes, sir?"

"You go in this time, and I will watch the door of the elevator in the garden. You go up to the top floor to the room where the elevator is, and if you can, let down the slide. In the meantime I will manage somehow to get the door open and when the slide comes down get on to it when you can hoist me up."

The butler shook his head.

"That arrangement can only be operated by the old man himself," he observed. "He carries the key which locks the elevator, and when it is locked nobody can operate it."

"Very well, then, I have another plan. Go up to McDermot's room and knock vigorously at the door. For fear he should come to the door and recognize you, slip on this false beard before you knock." Thad went on, handing him the article in question. "He will not recognize you then, and if he is not frightened at your appearance, you can disguise your voice and make some sort of a terrible declaration to the effect that he is your prisoner. That will certainly give him a scare, and he will shut his door in your face, jump on his secret elevator and attempt to escape. When he comes out of the garden door, I will nab him."

"That seems feasible, and I think we can work it, sir."

"There is no doubt of it. Go to the area door and get in somehow if you can, and I will go round here to the elevator door."

There was a high wall shutting the garden off from the street, but the detective, with the assistance of the butler, managed to scale it, and soon found himself in the garden.

As the gate was locked and bolted, he wondered how McDermot would manage to get out very quickly in case he was pushed for time, and it was with no little satisfaction that Thad reflected how easily he would pick the culprit up before he could get the gate unbarred.

And then he took up his post near the door of the elevator.

A half an hour went by, and still no sign of McDermot.

What did it mean? Was it possible that Boggs could not get in?

Thad waited and danced about to keep from freezing for another half hour, and then he began to lose his patience.

If the fellow could not get into the house, he thought, why had he not reported, instead of keeping him there in the cold all night? A man will lose his temper when his feet are cold, and the tardiness of some one else is responsible for it.

At length he decided to see what was the matter, and, unbolting the gate he went out. When he reached the area door there was nobody there, so the butler must either have got in, or abandoned the hope of it and gone away. And yet neither seemed feasible, for if the fellow had succeeded in getting in, what was he doing all this time? And why had he not frightened McDermot out of his room? And as for the other theory, the detective could hardly think the fellow capable of forsaking him in so shabby a manner as that.

After a little reflection he decided upon a rather heroic plan of bringing matters to a crisis.

Acting upon his decision, he ascended the stoop and rung the bell as loudly as his strength would permit. It was one of those old-fashioned bells, which depend upon main strength for their soft or harsh utterance, and the detective yanked it as though he intended pulling the wire and all into the street.

The action was followed by a short season of profound silence, such as had reigned before he pulled the bell, and then there was a movement inside. This was tardily followed by an increase in the brilliancy of the light in the hall, indicative of somebody having turned up the gas. At the end of another brief season the door was cautiously opened about three inches, and somebody's nose appeared, and the muffled

sound of somebody's voice issued from the crack, and battled with the stiff blast which was struggling to get in.

"Who's there?" demanded the voice, with a shaky tone which Thad could not decide whether to attribute to fear or the wind.

"An officer of the law!" declared Thad, in a stentorian voice.

"What do you want?" There was no question about the cause of the tremble this time.

"I want to come in," replied the detective, in the same *basso profundo* voice. "I have a warrant for the arrest of Edward McDermot!"

The face was withdrawn and a dead silence ensued, but strangely the door had not been closed, and to prevent the occurrence of such a thing, he slipped his foot in between the door and the jamb.

Thad had not heard any footsteps, but he felt that the person had left the door. However, when he attempted to push it further open he discovered that there was a chain across it which allowed it to open no further.

After the lapse of several minutes a light shuffling of feet on the stairs and later in the hall announced the approach of some one, and presently the nose came out again.

"Missus says he's gone," came the same tremulous voice again.

"Gone? Where?"

"Dunno."

"I am sorry that I cannot take your word. I must come in and see for myself."

The person on the other side of the door made no response, but the detective heard him shuffling away again.

Ten minutes later he returned with the announcement that "Missus had said that the master had surely gone; but that if the officer was not satisfied to take her word, he might come in and see for himself."

Thad told the attendant that he preferred to come in and see for himself, whereupon the chain was unfastened and dropped and the door swung open.

Before entering, however, the detective paused on the step for two or three minutes, during which time he kept his eye steadfastly on the garden gate. Having given the culprit time to descend his elevator and come out, as he thought, Thad entered the house and the door was closed behind him.

He mounted the stairs at once, intending to go straight to McDermot's room, but at the head of the stairs he was met by the lady again.

She shaded her eyes to examine his features as he ascended the stairs, and when he drew near her, she drew a deep sigh and said:

"Oh, excuse me, sir. I thought it was the same detective who was here earlier in the evening."

"Then you were not mistaken, madam. It is the same, only I am differently disguised this time."

Thad made this hasty explanation to expedite matters. He had no occasion to conceal his identity from her, inasmuch as she already knew he was a detective.

"Ah, yes, I recognize the voice now," she observed. "Well, sir, I am sorry to say that your mission will be as fruitless this time as it was before. He is gone."

He could not explain how it was; but as soon as he heard the woman's denial—in spite of the fact that the butler had warned him against her—he believed her.

"Has he been here since I left?" he asked.

"Yes, he was here quite a while, and would doubtless have stayed all night had not the old butler come and told him that you were coming after him, and then he left."

"Which way did he get out, madam?"

"The front way. The butler went with him. They have not been gone more than an hour—just about an hour, in fact."

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVEN THE WORM WILL TURN.

THAD was so well satisfied that the woman had told him the truth that he did not take the trouble of searching the house.

He saw the whole scheme of the wily but apparently meek butler now, but marveled at the depth of his villainy.

He recalled the strange expression on the fellow's face when he was about to enter the area door the night before, and which had aroused the detective's suspicions for an instant, but which he was too honest to harbor for any length of time.

He began to think now that truth and honesty did not exist in this sinful world, and felt as though in future he would be driven to distrust all his fellow-men.

Thad only stopped to ask one question.

"You do not know, I presume, which way they went?" he said.

To his surprise, the woman drew close to him, caught his sleeve, glanced cautiously up and down the hall as if to assure herself that no listener was near, and then whispered in his ear:

"Do you know of the existence of such a place as Hell's Kitchen, sir?"

Thad started as though she had stuck a sharp instrument into him.

"I do," he murmured faintly, overwhelmed with astonishment at the unexpected inquiry.

"Then, go there."

He was even more astounded than ever at this piece of advice, because he believed that he would find her husband there.

"Then you want your husband arrested?"

"I do," she said coldly and firmly. "He confessed to the murder to me, when I accused him, and then beat me shamefully. Look at this!" And she bared her arm and exhibited an ugly cut which appeared to have been made by some blunt instrument. "I want to see him hanged!" she cried passionately.

"You will probably have an opportunity," he responded coolly, "especially if I get hold of him. Good-night, or rather good-morning."

"I hope you will. Good-morning."

It was that darkest of hours which precedes the breaking of day when Thad approached his room once more.

He desired to procure his lantern and some other small articles which he thought he might need, before starting on his expedition to Hell's Kitchen, and was about to run up-stairs for the purpose, when his foot came in contact with some object lying on the dark stairway.

He stopped, fearing he had run upon another ghastly find, when the object rose up and spoke.

"Is that you, Mr. Burr?" came a weak, trembling voice.

Thad at once recognized the voice as that of Jimmie.

"Hello, my boy! What are you doing here?" he called out in a soft voice.

"He's there again, sir," was the reply.

"Who?"

"Packey Lynch. He's been there a long time, and he's got to stay awhile, I think, for he's sent for Lottie and he won't leave till she comes, 'cause I heard him tell the king that he had to skip the country to-morrow, and didn't have any money, and the only way to get it was to send for her and pull her leg, so the king sent one of his fellows after her. You'd better come over with me, and I'll take you up the same way we went before."

"All right, my boy. I'll be with you in a moment. Have you been here long?"

"Yes, sir, quite a while. I'd gone to sleep when you stumbled over me."

"You want to be careful how you go to sleep in such places, my boy, this cold weather. You might freeze to death."

"No danger, sir. The place I have to sleep all the time isn't much warmer than the stairs here."

"Poor boy! I hope we shall soon be able to find a better place for you. You might come and live with me, Jimmie."

"I should like it, sir. The policeman on the beat here told me the other day that if I did not keep off the street Gerry's men would pick me up. I don't want to go with them, sir. I would rather go with you. I don't want to be singing hymns and praying for cold victuals all the time."

"Is that what they do, Jimmie?" asked Thad laughing.

"That's what old Hawkins says."

"Old Hawkins ought to know."

By this time Thad had reached his room, and the boy was at his heels. He had forgotten all about the ghastly head until he lit the gas, and when the boy saw it, he uttered a terrified screech.

"Gosh!" he cried, as soon as he was over the first paroxysm of terror. "That's Black Whiskers' head! How did you get it, sir?"

Thad told the boy he had found it in the room on his return earlier in the evening.

"Did you know him, Jimmie?" he continued.

"Yes, sir. He used to come to the house with Packey Lynch. They called him Black Whiskers. I heard the king say the other day that Packey had fixed him because he wouldn't kill Shang Maher for him; but old Hawkins said that wasn't the reason. He said the reason was that Packey wanted Whiskers to fix his butler so that Whiskers and him would both be out of his way."

"What did he want them out of the way for, my boy?"

"'Cause they both knew about his murdering Shang."

"Well, I'm ready, Jimmie," said Thad. "Let's go."

They left the building, and ten minutes later were groping their way through the murky alley leading back to the court back of Hell's Kitchen.

The boy led the way, as before, and when he reached the stairs, he paused to whisper:

"Look out for the stairs, sir, they're covered with ice."

The lad climbed on up the stairs, closely followed by the detective.

The crazy door at the head of the stairs was not locked and the boy pushed it open and the two entered the little room which adjoined the sitting-room where McDermot had met the woman before.

The sitting-room was dimly lighted, but so far as any noise was concerned, it might have been deserted.

Thad put his ear to the frail partition and listened, and for some moments could hear nothing.

After a while, however, he heard a man clear his throat and expectorate.

"That's him," observed Jimmie, who had crept up beside the detective in the dark. "The woman hasn't come yet."

Hardly were the words out of the boy's mouth when the opening of a door announced the arrival of a new-comer.

The next instant Thad heard the well-known voice of McDermot addressing some one.

"Good-morning, Lottie," he said cheerily. "So you have come, have you?"

"Yes, I have come," she replied, in a dejected voice. "What do you want of me?"

The fellow laughed.

"What do I want of you? Come, that is good! What do you suppose I would send for you at this hour of the twenty-four for?"

"Money, I suppose, as usual."

"You never hit it truer in your life, Lottie. I want money, and I want it badly."

"But the three months are not nearly up yet. Indeed, scarcely a week has passed since you promised to not molest me for three months."

"That is very true, Lottie. But I did not know then what was to happen before the week was out. The fact is, I'm in a hole and I've got to jump the country. A confounded detective has been on my track for the last week, and has followed me so hotly that I haven't had an hour's sleep. This thing cannot go on. I must skip the country. A steamer sails to-morrow afternoon some time, and I purpose taking passage, if I can raise the dust, and so I come to you to help me out."

"How much do you require?" she asked despondently.

"Oh, a matter of five thousand will do me now. You can send me more as I need it when I get on the other side."

"That is a large amount to ask on so short a notice. When must you have it?"

"Before noon to-day."

"That is impossible."

"How impossible?"

"What excuse can I make to my husband for asking him for so large a sum?"

"That is no concern of mine. I only say that I must have it, and you must use your ingenuity to procure it for me. However," he went on in a milder tone, "I might make this suggestion: Don't bother about asking the old bloke for the money. He keeps a large amount in the house; I know he does, for you once told me so. He has the key in his pocket and is still asleep. He will sleep more soundly from this till nine o'clock than he probably has all night. You know the rest. Go and do it. I will meet you on the usual corner about noon."

"My God, Edward! do you want to disgrace me in the eyes of my husband, and spoil everything?"

"You may as well be disgraced in this way as in any other, for I tell you candidly that if I do not get the money, the old man shall know all about certain matters before night!"

The woman groaned.

The fellow was silent a moment, and then said:

"Come, hurry up! It will soon be daylight, and then everything will be lost."

"Before I promise you the money, Edward McDermot, there is one thing you must tell me. A thing you have long deferred, and that is regarding my boy. Is he dead or alive?"

"That question must remain unanswered until I receive the money," chuckled the fellow, heartlessly.

"Why do you keep me in such agony, Edward? Why can you not tell me now?" pleaded the woman.

"Because, for one thing, it gives me a good deal of solid enjoyment to see you suffer; and in the next place, keeping the truth away from you will serve as a kind of bond for the performance of your conduct."

This exhibition of brutality seemed to sting the woman into sudden desperation.

Every vestige of her former weakness had vanished, and she grew as cold as stone and a very rock of defiance.

"Then, sir," she fairly hissed, in cold, rasping tones, "if you will not reveal the truth about my child I cancel my agreement to give you the money, and defy you to do your worst!"

The fellow laughed derisively.

"Where do you think of residing after you leave your palace, my dear? on the island or at Hell's Kitchen?"

"Anywhere, so that I shall be free from your brutal persecutions, Edward McDermot. In the Penitentiary I shall be protected and I had rather be there than be a free woman and suffer the torture of constant persecution at the hands of a blackmailer!"

"Take care what you say!" he cried, threateningly.

"I fear you not. If I go to the island you will go to the electric chair."

"You may have a taste of the electric chair yourself, Mistress Lottie."

"I do not care."

"Then you are willing to accept this fate in lieu of the life of luxury and happiness in store for you if you only took it upon yourself to make friends with me!"

"I have made every reasonable and unreasonable offer, and you would have been constrained by pity long ago if you had not been utterly heartless!"

"No, there is one offer you have never made, and which is entirely within the bounds of reason."

"What is that?" she demanded eagerly.

"That which you refused me years ago, Lottie—yourself. Now, you know that I love you, and always did—"

"Stop, sir!" she almost screamed. "I will bear no more of your vile insults, and don't you dare to approach me!"

The anxious listener would have given a good deal to have seen this part of the episode; but as he could not, he was compelled to content himself with imagining what it was like.

He knew from the sound of the respective footsteps that both parties were standing in the center of the floor, where they had been almost from the first, and that now, the fellow had made a move toward the woman, which had occasioned her sudden outcry.

The ruffian laughed.

"Why, my dear, you know I would not harm you for the world," he said. "I love you altogether too much for that; and if you would permit me I would make you a better, truer and more loving husband than either of the men you have had."

He must have attempted to approach her again, for she again cried out in a defiant tone:

"Stop! Do not dare to approach me!"

This appeared to enrage the fellow.

He suddenly changed his attitude.

"What's to prevent me, if I choose?" he growled in a brutal tone of voice.

"I will," she shrieked. "Look at this!"

A low derisive chuckle was the response.

"Do you think I fear that little knife, Lottie dear? Come, put away that silver toothpick and give me a kiss."

Just then the detective heard a door open somewhere, followed by the shuffling of feet, and the next instant he was surprised to hear the strident voice of a female cry out:

"Not on yer life, Packey! I'm de on'y woman youse is got any right ter kiss, and dat goes. W'atter yer doin' biar wid dis mug, onyway?"

"Get out, of here!" growled the man.

"Not on yer life. See?" was the response, accompanied by a low, half maudlin chuckle.

"Get out I say!" roared the man, more angrily than before.

"Dat's jist w'at yours truly'll never do on yer life, Packey Lynch, an' dat's a safe bet. See?"

There was a short interval of silence; and then came the rasping voice of the latest arrival:

"Oh, I'd like ter scratch dem big blue eyes o' yourn out!"

This was doubtless addressed to the young woman.

"Leave this room immediately!" demanded the man again.

"I won't, see?" hiccuped the woman, who was evidently intoxicated. "You come wid me."

"Go, I tell you!"

"I won't!"

"If you don't, curse you, I'll kill you!"

This only caused her to laugh.

"Not on yer life," she hiccuped.

This appeared to drive the fellow into a frenzy.

The next moment the detective heard shuffling of feet; then a blow, followed by a woman's scream and the cry of the first woman:

"Don't, Edward! For God's sake, don't murder her!"

"Yes I will," he growled. And the threat was followed by a series of blows accompanied by the woman's agonizing shrieks.

In the mean time the detective was making every effort to burst through the wall and fly to the woman's rescue, but without success.

"Murder! Help! help!" cried the first woman, while the victim of the brute's wrath had already got beyond anything but moans and sobs—she was evidently fast approaching insensibility.

The half frantic detective still tore impotently at the stubborn boards of the partition.

Then all at once he heard a soft whisper near him and felt something cold against his hand.

"Take this, sir," said the voice, which he at once recognized as Jimmie's. He clutched the object and found it to be the handle of an axe. A moment later he had demolished the partition, and rushed to the unfortunate woman's rescue.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

WHEN Thad finally succeeded in getting into the room, a horrible sight met his gaze.

The poor victim of the brute's vengeance lay prone on the floor, with the ruffian still bending over her.

The woman's face and head had been brutally

beaten, and she was already insensible, and yet her slayer had only been temporarily stayed in his fiendish work, evidently, by the unexpected advent of the detective.

The fiend stood glaring with an expression of mingled surprise and malignance at the intruder.

His face was flushed with the excitement, to which drink had undoubtedly added its potent influence.

His eyes were bloodshot and wild like those of a cougar when about to begin the work of rending a victim, and he frothed at the mouth like a dog with hydrophobia.

In one hand he clutched the muzzle of a revolver, the butt of which he had been using as a club with which to attack the helpless victim of his wrath.

The other woman, whom Thad recognized as Mrs. Van Werth, stood a little apart from the murderer and his victim, wildly clasping her hands, while her face was a picture of horror.

The detective did not recognize the ruffian or the murdered woman, although he had seen the latter about Hell's Kitchen, and inferred from what Jimmie had told her, as well as what he had gathered from the conversation between him and Mrs. Van Werth, that the man was none other than Packey Lynch, the alleged slayer of Shang Maher.

Before the ruffian had time to recover from his surprise at the detective's presence, Thad had him covered with his revolver.

"Drop that pistol and throw up your hands!" he commanded.

The villain instantly realizing his terrible situation, determined to make one desperate effort for liberty.

The daring detective divined his motive; and pushing the pistol into the wretch's face, he cried in tones of terrible menace:

"Make another move and I will blow your head off!"

Lynch hesitated, but appeared anxious to delay matters in the hope of the arrival of assistance.

He evidently did not recognize the detective as the same man who had been following him so long and persistently, and probably imagining him some new man of less nerve than he already knew Thad Burr to possess, made a spasmodic attempt at bluff.

Casting a contemptuous glance at the man who had him covered, he uttered a low, brutal chuckle, and sneered:

"Wal, young feller, w'at d'yer want here?"

"I want you, Edward McDermot!" he responded sternly, "and you may as well surrender now as later, for as you see, I have the drop on you."

The fellow made a desperate attempt at gayety, but it was easy to be seen that his laughter was forced.

"Yer wants Edward McDermot, d'yer?" he growled.

"Yes."

"Wal, why t'ell don't yer go t' him, 'stead o' comin' t' me? My name's Packey Lynch. See?"

"Among your ruffianly associates of this den, probably," returned Thad; "but to those who know you for what you are, you are Edward McDermot. I know you, and not only know you to be Edward McDermot, but I know you to be the murderer of Shang Maher!"

This was as great a surprise to the ruffian as the detective's appearance a little while ago.

He blanched and became greatly agitated, but nerved himself against the weakness, and made a desperate effort at bluffing.

"Smart young feller, ain't yer? Who told yer dat I killed Shang Maher?"

"I have several witnesses, among them the the woman called the Tank," replied the detective.

At the mention of the Tank, McDermot shuddered and glanced instinctively toward the lifeless form on the floor.

Then he made another desperate effort to pull himself together, laughing derisively, and went on:

"Wal, young feller, ef ye'r dependin' on de Tank fer evydence, ye'll git left beautiful. See?"

"Why?" asked the detective in surprise.

"Cause," rejoined the other, jerking his thumb in the direction of the prostrate figure, "she's quit talkin' an' drinkin' too o' late."

Thad could not suppress a shudder at the brute's heartlessness, but he contrived to conceal his feelings, and replied:

"That is only one witness—and a very unimportant one—out of the way, my man. You have silenced the Tank without a doubt; but this lady is still in possession of her power of speech, and I have no doubt will be willing to tell what she knows of the affair."

Here the detective glanced at Mrs. Van Werth, and the look of approval and gratitude that she gave him assured him that he had not been unwarranted in his assertion, but, whether McDermot had noticed this or not, he affected to treat the matter as lightly as he had the idea of the Tank appearing against him.

"What, Lottie testify against me?" he laughed. Then seeing that he had forgotten himself, he dropped back into his assumed dialect,

and continued: "Not on yer life, would yer, ole gal?"

And he attempted to fix her with his gaze, which he had always found to be a potent charm in the past, but the woman evaded it and looking at the detective instead, answered:

"Yes, with all my heart! It will be the happiest day of my life when I see you sent to Sing Sing for life, or, what would be better, to the electric chair!"

The effect of this speech, coupled with the lady's demeanor, had a magical effect upon the ruffian.

His affected indifference and show of bravado instantly vanished, and the skulking villain—his true character—shone out.

He glared malignantly at the woman, ground his teeth and evinced by other symptoms a desire to fly at her and do her mortal injury. Fortunately, however, the detective stood between them and the ruffian was too much of a coward to attack him, even if the latter had not had the drop.

"Curse you!" he growled. "I'll get even with you for this yet!"

With that, and before the detective suspected what he was about to do, the crook jerked open the door, and, uttering a shrill whistle, bounded through.

The detective was after him instantly, but McDermot had got considerable start and was half-way down the stairs by the time Burr got outside the door. However, it did not take the latter many seconds to bound down after him and he succeeded in overtaking him by the time he reached the foot of the stairs.

Collaring McDermot with one hand and shoving his pistol into his face, the detective said in a stern undertone:

"Another move, and you are a dead man!"

The fellow paused and glanced anxiously along the corridor as if he expected assistance. Thad interpreted his look, and determined to hasten matters:

"Put out your hands!" he commanded.

The villain hesitated and glanced along the passage, but seeing no appearance of help from any of the denizens of Hell's Kitchen reluctantly put out his hands to receive the bracelets.

The detective brought out the handcuffs and had got them snapped on one wrist, when the rear door of the passage opened and King Anderson burst in.

"Jis' in time, king," cried McDermot. "I'm in a tight place."

Anderson quickened his pace when he realized the situation, and the detective knew it was he who was in a tight place. He was between two fires, and something must be done in short order or he was lost.

And it did not take him a second to make up his mind what to do.

Clubbing his revolver he gave McDermot a crack on the head that sent him reeling to the floor, and then quicker than lightning, turned and covered the other with his weapon.

This was a genuine surprise for the king, who was as arrant a coward as McDermot, and he came to a sudden standstill.

"Come another step and I'll perforate you!" reiterated Thad.

The fellow took the detective at his word, and was about to beat a hasty retreat, when the front door opened and old Hawkins strode quietly in.

Thad conceived that his case was now, indeed, a desperate one, but he did not lose his head.

At sight of Hawkins the king's courage returned, and he began moving upon the crook-taker again, at the same time uttering a low, derisive chuckle.

"Now, I reckon we've got yer, mug," he growled.

Thad saw that his last hope had vanished, unless he adopted something that was against his inclination. Leveling his revolver at the wretch he fired, breaking the king's arm.

Uttering a howl of pain the fellow turned and retreated from the passage.

This only left Hawkins for him to contend with, but when he turned toward him the detective saw that he had drawn a murderous-looking knife, and was stealing upon him like a tiger upon its prey. There was but one course for Thad now, and that was to shoot the old man before he could reach him. He therefore raised his pistol and fired, intending only to wound him, but unfortunately did not even hit Hawkins, and the next instant the latter sprung upon him and wrenched the revolver from his grasp. The detective was a powerful man, but he was an infant in the hands of this giant thug, and an instant later he had Thad down and the knife raised above his breast.

A second later the monarch of Hell's Kitchen would have plunged the murderous blade to the detective's heart, had not a fortunate circumstance prevented it.

Just at the critical moment the front door opened and a policeman put his head inside.

It was Patrolman Summers, the officer who was with Thad when the body of Shang Maher was found.

When Hawkins saw the blue-coat he quickly concealed his knife and affected the greatest un-

concern, but Summers took in the situation at a glance.

"What's up here, Hawkins?" he demanded.

"Oh, nuthin' 'tall officer," drawled Hawkins, innocently. "Me an' one o' de boys was a-bevin' a little scuffle, dat's all."

"Who fired that shot?" demanded the officer.

"It was I, Tom," interposed the detective, who had by this time regained his feet.

"And who are you?"

"Thad Burr," was the cool rejoinder.

"The devil! Well, what have you done?"

"Bagged the game," answered Thad, pointing toward McDermot, who had arisen to a sitting posture.

"Good! Shall I call a burry-up?"

"If you please, Tom!"

"Is there anybody else here that you want?" queried Summers, looking very hard at old Hawkins.

"Yes, we'll take this chap along when you come back."

The policeman went out to ring in a call for the patrol, while the detective snapped the bracelet upon McDermot's remaining arm.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET OUT.

WHEN McDermot and old Hawkins had been placed in the patrol-wagon Thad instructed the officers in charge to tell the sergeant that he would be down in a little while to prefer charges against the prisoners as he had some others to look after at the present which would not keep.

He then requested the patrolman to remain with him for a little while, and, accompanied by that officer, he returned up-stairs to the room in which the murder had been committed.

He had said nothing to the policeman about the tragedy, and when they reached the room he was surprised and horrified at the sight which met his gaze.

The detective was also astonished to find that both Mrs. Van Werth and Jimmie had disappeared.

"Who did this?" cried the horrified officer.

"McDermot," returned Thad.

"Who is he?"

"The chap whom the boys just now took down."

"Lynch, you mean," corrected the officer.

"His name is Packey Lynch. Are you sure you have got the right name?"

"Dead sure," rejoined the detective. "You, as well as a good many others, know him as Packey Lynch, Tom; but his real name is Edward McDermot."

"It's none of my business how you discovered this, old man. It's a part of your detective work to discover secrets which no one else ever dreamed of. But we must make some disposition of this body, Thad."

"As in the case of Shang Maher's stiff, Tom, I will have to leave the matter to you," responded Thad.

"Full of business as usual, eh?" put in the officer.

"Yes. I have some things to look after just now which will not keep. Good-by."

And the detective hurried away, leaving Summers to look after the remains of the murdered Tank.

When Thad reached the street door leading up to his room he was surprised to find not only Jimmie, but Mrs. Van Werth, there.

The lady grasped his hand impulsively as soon as she recognized the detective.

"I cannot tell you how much I owe you, sir," she cried passionately. "You have not only released me from the toils of that arch-villain, but you have been the means of restoring to me my—boy!"

The detective was bewildered.

"What, is Jimmie your son?" he asked breathlessly.

"No, but Harry is," she said, hugging the ragged little fellow to her.

"Well, then, Mrs. Van Werth, you may thank your son quite as much as, if not more than, myself for bringing about this happy denouement, for if it had not been for him it would have taken me many a day to get at the bottom of this business, if indeed, I had ever penetrated the mystery."

The lady made no other reply than to press her son more closely to her. After a few seconds' silence, however, during which Thad was engaged in unlocking the door, she said:

"Mr. Burr, I would like to have a few words with you in private, that is, I mean off the street."

"Very well, ma'am. Come right up into my room."

And without more ado the detective began to climb the stairs, followed by the lady and her son, whom we shall still know as Jimmie.

There was one thing that kept puzzling Thad's mind all the way up, and when they had finally reached the room and he had lighted the gas (for it was still dark in the room), he turned to the lady and asked:

"How did you manage to recognize me in this disguise, Mrs. Van Werth?"

"I did not, sir," she answered. "My boy told me who you were."

"Ah, I wondered how it was possible for you to know me. Take a seat, ma'am. Now," he continued when they were both seated, "what did you wish to say to me?"

The lady was silent for some time, and finally began:

"My boy tells me that you overheard the greater part of the conversation between McDermot and myself."

"I did, madam," replied the detective.

"It will be unnecessary for me to tell you, then, that the man known as Shang Maher was my husband and this boy's father, or that McDermot was his rival for my hand."

"I heard that much," admitted Thad.

"When I first met the two they were inseparable cronies, both belonged to good families and had plenty of money, but were, like many young men with rich parents, rather wild. At that time I was a variety actress, possibly somewhat fascinating and pretty, judging from the number of my real or pretended admirers, besides being what is called a favorite actress. In short, I had succeeded well enough for the critics to say that I had taken the town by storm."

"Well, among my admirers were these two young men. I soon found that I preferred Jerold Maher, although he was my senior and McDermot's by ten years; but he was generous and affectionate and lavished money upon me. Ah, me, if he had kept the money he spent in those days for costly flowers and diamonds for giddy Lottie Gay—that was my stage name—and refrained from 'playing the races,' as they call it, he need not to have seen the day when he was glad of a meal of cold victuals."

"We were finally married and lived happily and in grand style for three years, when gambling brought him to bankruptcy. We had to give up our fine house, our horses and carriages and content ourselves with a much humbler mode of life. Still, we had a little left and might have got along had my husband stopped gambling. But this he would not do as long as there was a dollar left. Then he took to drinking and we had many disgraceful quarrels. About this time, too, McDermot began to poison his mind against me. By giving my husband money to buy liquor with he kept on the good side of him and finally convinced my husband that I was untrue to him. Jerold brought suit for divorce on that ground, and so well had McDermot laid his plans that, although God knows I was innocent, it was made to appear that I was guilty."

"Of course I knew nothing of McDermot's villainy at the time, and put all the blame upon my husband. McDermot, in the mean time, pretended to be my best friend, lavished money on me and, after my husband obtained the decree of divorce, wanted to marry me. I rejected him, just as I had done before; but to my surprise, instead of becoming enraged over the refusal, he affected to take the matter lightly, and finally brought about the meeting between my present husband and myself which resulted in our marriage."

"This was McDermot's scheme. You heard him explain to-night why he desired to raise me to my present social and financial standing. He undoubtedly told the truth, although I did not dream of such a thing at that time."

"At the time my husband obtained his divorce little Harry was only three years old and McDermot persuaded me to let him take the child and place him with some wealthy friends of his, and considering that I was unable to give the child the care I wished (I expected to have to return to the stage), I consented. He took my boy away; but, instead of taking him to any wealthy friends, I know now that he took him to the horrible place we have just left, and I was given half to understand that he was dead but never allowed to know positively whether he was or not."

"Why did you not put your case in the hands of the police?" asked the detective.

"That is what I should have done; but I was prevented from doing so by several things. One was that, for a long time McDermot assured me that my child was in the best of hands, and when I finally had reason to suspect that such was not the case (that was after I was married to my present husband, and McDermot had lost all his money and been convicted of forgery), I was deterred by threats of exposure, such as you heard him make to-night. You see, my husband did not know that I had a child."

"He will know it now."

"Yes, I shall make a clean breast of the whole affair to him in the morning, and abide the consequences."

"And he will no doubt forgive you," interposed the kind-hearted detective. "But now tell me, Mrs. Van Werth, was it you I saw meet Bull Anderson and old Hawkins on the corner of Fourth avenue and Fifty-second street one night recently—the night preceding the day upon which I called upon you?"

"It was."

"Did you not give them money on that occasion?"

"I did. That was the five thousand dollars you probably heard McDermot refer to."

"What was that for?"

"Simply money which he had furnished me when I was poor and he was rich. I could have paid it in a hundred other ways, but he led me to believe that this was the only safe way to prevent my husband from discovering the transaction which, as McDermot said, would lead to an investigation and the discovery on the part of my husband what my past life has been. I know now that the villain's sole object was to get a firmer hold upon me by making it appear that the money was paid for the murder of my former husband. God knows I had no reason or desire to put him out of the way."

"And now, Mr. Burr, you have my whole story. If you wish to investigate it any further or suspect that I had anything to do with the crime, I am ready at any time to furnish you all the proof you desire of the truth of what I have told you."

"I am already convinced (especially after hearing the conversation between yourself and McDermot) that you have told nothing but the truth, and I have but one request to make, and that is that you will go into court and tell what you know of this man McDermot."

"That I will do with pleasure, as I assured you before. And now, as it is after daylight, I will thank you to call a carriage for us and I will go home, with my boy."

"Certainly, with pleasure," responded the detective, and hastened out to execute the commission.

A few minutes later he returned, and both were placed in the carriage and driven away, after the lady had reiterated her protestations of gratitude, and invited the detective to call at her house and receive the hospitality of herself and husband.

Thad then repaired to the police station, where he preferred charges against Edward McDermot for the murder of Jerold, alias Shang Maher, and against old Hawkins for interfering with an officer in the performance of his duty.

Thus ended his adventure among the thugs of Hell's Kitchen.

There is nothing to add as a sequel to this episode in the great detective's stirring career except that some weeks later Packey Lynch, alias Edward McDermot, was tried and sentenced to the electric chair; while the Anderson gang received terms in the Penitentiary according to their offenses.

THE END.

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